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A LIFE'S DEVOTION

BY

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“A BITTER REPENTANCE.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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A LIFE'S DEVOTION.

CHAPTER I.

It was upon one of those typical Irish days, when the sun persistently refuses to cast its beneficent rays over the face of nature, but, notwithstanding, a day soft, breezy, and exhilarating, that a young man in full shooting attire, and carrying a gun on his shoulder, found himself, as he deemed, hopelessly astray in the wilds of the county Leitrim. It is a county boasting of scant beauty, but abounding in a multitude of small and large flat-shored lakes, rich also in innumerable bogs of a dark brown hue, which characteristics give to the scenery a certain wild and weird expression especially its own.

To those brought up and dwelling in the vicinity of these lakes and brown bogs, their

cheerless, unkempt aspect has many attractions, unappreciated by the more cultivated English eye. And, to the stalwart young Briton who now viewed it for the first time, the desolate landscape surrounding him on all sides was mournful and uninteresting to the last degree. In vain he strained his gaze in every direction, not the vestige of a human dwelling was to be seen, and Captain Carmichael, being desperately hungry, disconsolately reflected that his chances of procuring food on this dreary waste were of the remotest description.

He had quitted, at an early period that morning, the inn where he had been staying for the night, *en route* to the house of his friend, Lord Ballina, to whom he was going to pay a long-promised visit, and having no predilection for the only mode of locomotion offered him, an Irish jaunting-car, he had elected to walk across the intervening bogs to his host's place, a distance of about ten miles as the crow flies. Being a keen sportsman, he looked forward to a day's snipe-shooting as compensation for his solitary walk, and, believing he clearly understood the directions given him, had refused a

guide. His sole companion was, therefore, a black retriever, who now, evidently considering that his day's work should be ended, sat down on his haunches, and, looking up at his master, gave a prolonged dismal whine. . Stooping and patting the animal's head, Captain Carmichael mournfully addressed his canine friend, saying,

‘Ah, you are evidently hungry also, old boy, but, as far as I can see, starvation stares us both in the face, for not the ghost of a human being do I see anywhere.’

These words had hardly passed his lips ere he was pleasantly surprised by hearing a loud, shrill voice call out, in a rich Hibernian brogue,

‘Miss Shelah ! Miss Shelah ! Come back, me jewel. It's damping, and it's yer death you'll catch, and not the insect.’

Overjoyed at the sound of a human voice, the young man turned and observed, for the first time, a woman standing at a little distance from him, and violently gesticulating to some one in the distance. Looking round to see to whom her words were addressed, he perceived the tiny figure of a child, conspicuous from her wearing a scarlet cloak, flitting to and fro, like a Will-

o'-the-Wisp, on the partially reclaimed bog over which he had been shooting. No response was vouchsafed by this little figure to the imploring words addressed her, beyond a silvery laugh accompanied by an impatient waive of a small hand, as, with the agility of a young kid, she sprang across one of those deep narrow fissures of which there were many throughout the bog, and from whence turf was wont originally to be cut.

The child was absorbed in the chase of a dilatory butterfly that had delayed its entrance into gayer life until summer suns and bright flowers were glories of the past, reckless that its ephemeral existence must inevitably be curtailed by the nipping frosts of early autumn. For the season was rapidly advancing, and the soft October breeze, precursor of fiercer winds, even now bore on its downy western wings an ever-increasing mist from the Atlantic, whose waves were breaking in solemn grandeur on the rocky waste not very many miles distant, while several sea-gulls, their snowy bosoms making specks of light against the dark sky, hovered low in the air, giving forth their melancholy cry that foretells the coming storm.

‘Damping’ is essentially an Irish expression, accurately describing a state of weather which is neither rain nor fog, but which will assuredly as thoroughly penetrate your garments, if you remain exposed to its insidious influence a sufficient length of time, as the veriest downpour of rain. But, in the joyous freedom of the hour, both child and butterfly were equally unmindful of what evil possibility the future might hold in store for them. As yet the butterfly’s wings were unweighted by the mist, the child’s spirit was undashed by any fear of evil consequences.

As he watched, with suddenly awakened interest, the graceful movements of what appeared to him a spirit of the bog, so suddenly had it arisen on his vision, the young sportsman forgot his previous anxieties respecting his whereabouts, and became equally oblivious of the pangs of hunger from which he had been suffering, while his dog, with the instinctive sagacity of its race, evidently confident that succour was at hand, jumped up and cocked its ears excitedly.

In the meanwhile, the little figure was rapidly approaching nearer to the young sportsman,

but she was too intent on the object she had in view to be aware of his presence. In her hand she held a slender reed to which was attached a green, muslin bag, wherewith she trusted to imprison her prey, not with any fell purpose, but in order that, by closer inspection, she might feast her eyes on its beautiful gay colouring.

‘Butterfly, butterfly, do please stay a while,’ she called out, imploringly, and panting for breath, as with eager impetuosity she sped swiftly over the bog after the tantalising object of her desire, ever eluding the net as she felt secure of the prize.

The rays of a lurid setting sun momentarily appearing from beneath a heavy bank of onimously black clouds, cast occasional vivid yellow lights across the dark bog, causing the child’s figure, every now and again, to stand out clear and sharp against the sky, notwithstanding the rapidly increasing gloom of the weather.

In her white frock and little scarlet cloak, which, caught by the breeze, floated airily about her, and with her fair hair blowing about in the

wildest confusion, this sprite made a bright speck of animated life, enlivening the otherwise depressing landscape. Her hat she had long discarded, and fastened to her waistband, and there certainly seemed every chance of the child catching the cold predicted by her nurse.

Farther and farther she was flying away from this anxious attendant, whose lungs were exhausted from shrieking out for the return of her refractory charge. Finally, hopeless of being obeyed, she prepared to pursue the truant, murmuring in wild despair, as she tucked up her petticoats preparatory to the chase,

‘Oh, Patrick, Patrick, ye blessed saint, when ye were about it, why didn’t ye expel them painted desaving insects out’ of the island along with all the other sarpints and reptiles.’

Just at this moment, the child suddenly arrested her headlong career, and stood immovable. The butterfly had alighted on a tuft of decaying heather.

With her red lips parted, and her eyes, which in singular contrast to her fair hair, were very dark, wide open from excitement, she stealthily approached the object she had so long been

pursuing, holding in her hand the slender pole, to which the green bag was attached, well aloft and stretched out to the utmost limit her small arm could manage. Even then she found she was not sufficiently near to the anticipated prize, and therefore, unheeding where she trod, she advanced cautiously on tip-toe a little closer to the beauteous insect, now busily occupied imbibing what nourishment it might extract from the withered heather. Secure of victory, the child hardly dared to breathe. Everything must be done so gently in order not to injure the butterfly in any way; for Shelah had a tender heart. Lower and lower the green bag descended. It was all but touching the happy butterfly, still unconscious of its danger.

But, alas, at the very moment when the prize seemed to be under the little hunter's very hand, the sudden, quick bark of a dog caused her not only to start violently, but to drop the pole quivering in her grasp, while at the same inauspicious instant her foot caught in a soft lump of moss, and over she rolled into a deep bog-hole on the very edge of which she had, unconsciously, been standing. Alarmed by the

commotion, away flew the butterfly, and, if butterflies can laugh, this one must certainly have indulged in merriment at Shelah's expense.

Some one did laugh, at a little distance, a hearty, but melodious laugh. To the child this seemed to be close in her ear.

'The fairies are mocking at me, or perhaps it is the Will-o'-the-Wisp, to which Mick says the bog really belongs,' whispered Shelah softly to herself, and hiding her face in her hands.

She had often been in a bog-hole before, and did not feel the least terror of her present position, but she did stand a little in awe of the Will-o'-the-Wisp, though she had a great longing to see this mysterious being, but not when alone. And Mick had promised some day they should see him together.

Luckily for Shelah, the bog-hole into which she had fallen only contained a few inches of water, but it was dark and brown in colour, and she had fallen on her face. The ground was, however, soft and spongy, therefore she was wholly uninjured, but, notwithstanding, her pretty face and frock were sadly discoloured from the effects of the brown water, and the child presented but

a sorry figure, as she stood, dismayed and disconsolate, in the dismal hole, into which the ardour of the chase had cast her. Then, though she had often tumbled into bog-holes before, never had fate betrayed her into one where the sides were so steep and smooth as this.

How could she ever extricate herself without help? As she turned this problem over in her mind, a second laugh, just above her head, caused her to tremble from head to foot; but after all, if it was the Will-o'-the-Wisp making fun of her, perhaps he was good-natured, and would aid a poor little girl in her difficulties, if she was very civil and betrayed no fear. Gathering courage from this reflection, she ventured to glance upwards, peeping through her fingers, when she encountered a pair of keen, grey eyes looking humorously, but kindly down upon her, while a melodious voice said, cheerfully,

‘Pluck up courage, little lady. I am your knight come to deliver you from the black prison into which unkind fate has plunged you.’

So saying, he of the grey eyes and kindly voice, jumped down into the bog-hole, and stood by Shelah's side, inspiring her with com-

fort and hope of deliverance from durance vile.

He was a tall man, whose dark-brown curly head rose above the depths of the bog-hole, and, taking the child in his arms, he easily hoisted her up, and placed her on *terra firma*, where his dog, whose bark had caused Shelah's mishap perhaps considering himself to blame, sniffed amicably about her wet skirts, and then proceeded to lick her hands in a protective, sympathetic manner.

‘What a brave little woman you are not to cry over such a nasty fall,’ said Shelah's rescuer, as, with his hands resting on the side of the bog-hole, he vaulted nimbly out and stood beside her.

Raising a pair of velvety brown eyes, the child looked up shyly. Quickly her thoughts had travelled, and she felt convinced that this tall stranger, so unexpectedly arisen to aid her, could by no means be the Will-o'-the-Wisp, whom Mick had described as small of stature and singularly ill-favoured. Moreover, the proverbial lantern was wanting.

‘Was it you who laughed at me?’ she asked,

solemnly. 'I thought it was the Will-o'-the-Wisp.'

'And you could have forgiven him for being so rude, but not me !' he replied, smiling.

'The Will-o'-the-Wisp would have known no better, and besides Mick says the bog belongs to him. It is rude of a grown-up gentleman to laugh at people in trouble.'

'So it is, little one ; but I have helped you out of yours. This good office the Will-o'-the-Wisp neglected to perform. So you must forgive me.'

'But I don't like being laughed at,' she replied, ruefully, as she shook her dripping golden hair back from her pretty face.

'Nobody does, little one. Ridicule has a potent power of its own, and hurls us down head-long when other forces fail to touch us. But in truth I was not laughing at you, but at my dog's comical look of surprise at your sudden engulfment. But come, don't cry, and make me consider you no braver than other little girls !' he said, kindly, seeing the tears welling up in her eyes as she looked disconsolately down at her stained frock. 'Here, we will see if we can't

make this look better,' he continued, taking out his handkerchief and beginning to dry her dress.

Shelah choked back her desire for a good cry. She was proud of being thought brave, and losing her shyness thanked this kind stranger prettily. She felt comforted by his assurance that he had not laughed at her.

'I had been watching you for some time,' he said, as he scrubbed diligently at her frock. 'I forgot my own sport in observing yours, and lost some snipe in consequence. But tell me, what were you running after so wildly?'

'A butterfly,' she half sobbed out. 'I only wanted it to stay a little while with me. It was so beautiful, but it has gone quite—quite away, and we shall see no more this year. And it is my greatest pleasure to catch one, not to hurt it but just to look at it.'

'Poor little girl, I am so sorry for you. But, the more eagerly we rush after the butterfly pleasures of this life, the more certain we are to meet with disappointment,' he replied, looking down on her rather sadly. 'Such pleasures are as ephemeral as the insect life they represent. And yet we are never weary of the chase.'

The young man sighed heavily, he had been speaking more to himself than to the child, but, as she looked up at him with a puzzled air of enquiry, he smiled, and, realising that he was talking above her comprehension, said cheerily,

‘There, the frock looks much better, and you will get no scoldings I feel sure.’

‘Scoldings!’ she laughed, merrily. ‘I’m never scolded.’

‘Never scolded! then you are never naughty.’

‘Oh, yes, sometimes. But then I’m always sorry afterwards, quick, quite quick,’ she added, gravely.

‘That is more than bigger folks are. But tell me, little one, are you allowed to wander about all alone on this melancholy bog? For, if the Will-o’-the-Wisp is your sole guardian, he has been very careless of his charge to-day.’

‘Hush! You must not talk so loud about him. He is spiteful sometimes. Perhaps he is angry with me for hunting the butterflies.’

She looked round furtively.

‘Why so?’

‘Because Mick says they are the souls of the Will-o’-the-Wisps, which they have lost, and

when the butterflies come on the bog the Will-o'-the-Wisps try to catch them. But you see I only wanted to look at the butterfly, I would not hurt one for the whole world, so it was spiteful of the Will-o'-the-Wisp to push me into the bog; for,' she added, confidentially, 'I think he did.'

'It was very ungallant of him to be so rude to such a dear little girl,' replied the young man, gazing down with deep interest upon the child's innocent face, lifted up to his so confidently.

But all further conversation between them was arrested by the appearance of Shelah's nurse, who pale with fright ran breathlessly up, exclaiming with tears in her eyes,

'Oh! Miss Shelah! Miss Shelah! Are you hurt? It's the death of me you'll be some day, mavourneen, hunting after them desaving insects.'

Then she fell to hugging and kissing the child; scolding her humorously meanwhile. Finally, having nearly smothered her with caresses, she turned to the tall stranger, and making a curtsy said, with grateful effusion,

'Blessed be all the saints you were nigh, sir, for Miss Shelah's is a precious life.'

She pressed the child again to her faithful heart as she spoke, while Shelah, nestling in her arms, whispered mournfully,

‘The Will-o’-the-Wisp would not let me catch the butterfly after all, Bridget.’

‘I sometimes think you will turn out to be a Will-o’-the-Wisp yourself, darling.’

‘I am a little girl, so I can’t be, and I have a soul—I have a soul,’ replied the child, triumphantly, ‘and they have lost theirs.’

As she spoke, she broke away from her nurse, who, having tied on her hat, was endeavouring to tighten the silver clasps of her scarlet cloak, and began to dance wildly on the bog in the exuberance of childish spirits. Captain Carmichael gazed at her with amused admiration; her brightness and beauty were in such strange contrast with the scenery; and, catching hold of her, he said:

‘I believe you are a bog-fairy yourself, pretty one, and therefore ought to have compassion on the poor Will-o’-the-Wisps who you say have lost their souls, and, wiser than many others, are aware of their great loss, and seek to recover them.’

‘But they sha’n’t, they sha’n’t. For I love the butterflies, and, if the Will-o’-the-Wisps get back their souls, I shall never see my pretty friends again,’ called out the child, continuing her wild dance, in which the dog now joined, frisking about her and barking loudly, in acknowledgment of having so congenial a play-mate.

‘You are pitiless, little Shelah; but what a pretty name yours is. I have never heard it before.’

The child stopped dancing, and, opening her dark eyes very wide, said solemnly, in a tone of surprise,

‘Never heard it before? Why, I am descended from the kings of Ireland. We had kings of our own once, and Mick says, when we have driven all the English into the sea, we shall have them again. And then I shall be a queen, a queen.’

‘Queen Shelah, allow me to kneel down and kiss your hand in token of my future allegiance,’ he answered, gaily, kneeling down and kissing the little hand which, to his great amusement, she held out with considerable dignity towards

him. Springing to his feet, he turned to the nurse, saying :

‘It is most fortunate for me that I met you, for I have lost my way on these bogs, and I feel sure you can tell me the nearest road to Lord Ballina’s.’

‘Why, that is my papa!’ exclaimed Shelah, excitedly. ‘And you must be the English gentleman he is expecting.’

‘Queen Shelah, this is most fortunate. Lead on, pretty one, for here comes the rain, which indeed does not seem long absent from your majesty’s dominions.’

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN CARMICHAEL had not spoken without reason, for it was no longer damping, but a steady downpour had begun to fall, while the long line of yellow light on the horizon, which had lent momentary brightness to the mournful landscape, had wholly disappeared, and the bank of black clouds above had lowered and now appeared to lie on the distant edge of the bog. Nothing remained to redeem the unutterable dreariness of the landscape except the figure of the child in her scarlet cloak, which Bridget had now firmly secured about her neck, while she endeavoured to retain her by the hand in order to prevent further escapades.

But vain were the good woman's efforts, for every now and then Shelah broke loose, and, rushing from beneath the sheltering umbrella, danced wildly on in front, tossing her arms

gleefully up in the air as, with youthful agility, she sprang over—when this was feasible—every bog-hole that impeded her joyous career, while the dog, madly excited at having made acquaintance with so congenial a companion, joined merrily in her fun and frolic. That Shelah was slightly self-willed was apparent from her total disregard of Bridget's commands that she should return beneath the shelter of the umbrella, but when the woman called out, in tender accents, 'It's me heart you're breaking, Miss Shelah,' the little girl raced back like lightning, kissed the nurse's hand, and walked by her side quite demurely for some minutes, chattering meanwhile with the young man with all the innocent familiarity of childhood.

'Do you see that plantation of fir-trees? Behind it is our lake and our house. Are you going to stay with papa long? Have you brought money for the poor people?'

Her face assumed a graver look as she made this last query, and she fixed her dark, speaking eyes on him.

'I hope to stay some weeks with your papa, little Shelah, and I *have* brought some money

for the poor people, which I hope may be of use.'

'Oh, I am so glad!' she replied, earnestly. 'They suffer so much. When I am queen, I will make new laws for them. And everybody shall have plenty to eat and no one shall ever wear rags. I don't sleep at nights sometimes thinking of the poor little children. They are so thin—so thin, and hardly any clothes on.'

Her eyes filled with tears as she spoke. The joyous little fairy had been suddenly transformed into a prematurely suffering human soul; suffering for those woes of others it was daily called upon to witness.

'Please, sir, don't encourage her to talk about the famine,' said Bridget, in a low tone. 'She thinks too much about it. And we bring her out here that she may sport about awhile, away from sight of scenes sad enough for older eyes than hers, bless her heart.'

Suddenly the child, who had become quite silent after her last remark, looked slyly up into the young man's face, and said, confidentially,

'I know your name. It is Hugh. Papa calls you "dear old Hugh;" and mamma looks sad

when your name is mentioned, and says, "Poor Hugh!" Why are you poor, Hugh? You have not lost your soul, have you?"

'I devoutly trust not, pretty one,' he replied. 'Perhaps your mother calls me "poor Hugh" because she knows that, like you, I was in pursuit of a butterfly, and, just as I thought I was secure of making it my own, it escaped me for ever.'

Hugh Carmichael looked down upon the child with a sad smile as he uttered these words.

'I'm so sorry—so sorry,' she whispered, stealing her hand into his, with some dim perception that her new friend's words implied a deeper meaning than they expressed, for she knew grown-up people did not hunt butterflies.

But though Shelah's sympathies had been quickly enlisted for the young man's trouble, whatever it might be, the childish nature soon re-asserted itself, and once again she broke loose from her nurse, giving way to peals of laughter, as the rain came down faster and more furiously.

'Is she the only child?' asked the young man of the nurse, on her return from a victorious chase after Shelah.

‘Yes, sir. Miss Shelah is sole heiress of the Ballina demesnes, here and in Sligo. May the Blessed Virgin shield her from all harm. Oh! but I wish we were at home. It is well-nigh a mile to the house. But, heaven be praised, we’re off the bog.’

A humorous expression had passed over Hugh Carmichael’s face at Bridget’s proud announcement that Shelah was an heiress, for he was well aware the Ballina estates, running over three counties, vast as they were, were mortgaged to within a few hundreds of their annual value, and thus the little heiress was not likely to benefit materially from the heritage handed down to her by a kingly line of ancestors. Moreover, the entail on the Ballina estates had been cut off during the life of the late lord, and consequently they could be sold, if found necessary, at any moment.

But further conversation on this subject was arrested by the little party finding themselves on the edge of a narrow road, or rather causeway, running straight through the bog, and flanked on either side by a yawning, black ditch, which foreboded dire misfortune to the unwary traveller on a moonless night. Over this ditch

Hugh Carmichael vaulted nimbly, holding the little girl in his arms, while Bridget floundered through the abyss as best she could. If the young Englishman considered the scenery through which he had passed in the morning the dreariest he had ever seen, the road upon which he now found himself surpassed all his preconceived notions of what was dismal and depressing in nature.

‘What a God-forsaken country!’ he murmured, in a low voice. ‘How has the gay society-loving Dermot ever been able to exist here so contentedly all these years? The fact of his having noble, peerless Helen to cheer his solitude can alone be a satisfactory solution of what appears so incomprehensible.’

But opinions as regard scenery, depending as they do on early and familiar association, are apt to differ. And, as Captain Carmichael thus soliloquised, the child looked regretfully back on the deserted bog over which she had been so gaily careering, and, kissing her hand towards it, cried out,

‘Good-bye, dear, beautiful bog. Good-night, poor Will-o’-the-Wisps without souls.’

After these words, either that she was tired, or that she found less excitement in walking on the monotonous, straight road than on the springy, heather-clad bog, Shelah, of her own accord, took Bridget's hand, and walked soberly and in silence by her side and beneath the umbrella she held. But as she neared home, where she had witnessed so many sad scenes, it seemed as though her joyous spirit became weighted with melancholy thoughts, for, after a prolonged silence, she whispered,

‘Don't let us go home through the village, Bridget, but by the lake.’

‘It is longer that way; but as you like, me jewel. And his lordship, when he sees the rain, will send the carriage for us, I'm thinking.’

‘She fears the sad sights in the town, sir,’ observed Bridget, in low tones, to Capt. Carmichael.

To her new acquaintance Shelah spoke but once again, and then only as though she felt bound to direct his attention as a stranger to the more remarkable features of the landscape lying on their route. Pointing to what appeared to him a stack of turf standing a few yards from the road, she said,

‘That is Mick’s house. It is so pretty inside. He has strings of different birds’ eggs hanging on the walls, and such a nice tame pig, which knows me quite well. Mick is away fishing now. But I will take you to see him to-morrow. He is my greatest friend.’

A smile passed over the young man’s face as he gazed in astonishment and incredulity at the wretched abode indicated by his *cicerone*, which certainly appeared fitter to be a shelter for pigs than a dwelling for human beings. But he had an idea the child would resent any disparaging remarks he might pass on this her ‘greatest friend’s’ house, so he answered, gravely,

‘I shall be very pleased to make the acquaintance of your friend, and of the pig also. Indeed, Mick seems so learned a man, such a profound psychologist, that when you are queen you ought to make him your prime minister.’

‘He is very clever; after papa, the cleverest person I know. But,’ she added, shyly, ‘what is psy—psy—— I can’t say it. It is such a long word. It must be very hard to spell; and I am only in three syllables.’

‘It is indeed a long word,’ he replied. ‘But you are such a clever little girl to be already in three syllables that, if I try to explain this hard word, you will I am sure be enlightened. Once upon a time there was a lovely little girl called Psyche, who like you was so fond of butterflies, she always carried one on her head. The people who lived in those days said this butterfly was an emblem of the immortal soul and the eternity of love, for true love like our souls, little Shelah, can never die. It must be on this ancient story that Mick has built his pretty romance about the Will-o’-the-Wisps and your friend the butterflies, though where he gained such knowledge puzzles me. I fear you are not, after all, much wiser for my information, Queen Shelah,’ he concluded, with a smile at the perplexed expression of the pretty face and glorious eyes gazing up earnestly at him.

‘Oh, I understand a little bit,’ she replied, with reflective truth. ‘And Mick knows everything. I will ask him more about it.’

Shelah evidently considered Mick’s learning was more profound and more to be depended upon than her new friend’s.

‘I only wish he were here now,’ she added, plaintively, ‘for I’m so tired, and he would carry me.’

‘Why, I can do that, sweet child, quite as well as your learned friend Mick.’ And, suiting the action to the word, he caught her up in his arms.

Enchanted at having so willing a carrier, she stroked his face with her small hand, saying,

‘You are very kind, Mr. Hugh. I’m sorry you lost your butterfly, though I don’t think it was one like mine. Will you tell me about it? I like stories.’

‘You are a cute little fairy,’ he replied, kissing the innocent face so near his own. ‘But my story would not amuse you. Besides, it ends badly.’

‘Oh, then I don’t want to hear it,’ she replied, quickly, letting her head fall back on the young man’s shoulder.

Soon her eyelids drooped, and she fell fast asleep. Though he carried both his gun and game-bag, her slight weight in addition was as nothing to Captain Carmichael, who was in the fullest vigour of manly strength and health.

Not strictly handsome, so clear and piercing was the glance of his keen grey eye, so firm and reliable were the lines of his well-cut mouth, so nobly reflective the expression of his face when in repose, so beaming with intelligence and quick sympathy with the feelings and thoughts of others when engaged in conversation, that he never failed to inspire with both respect and affection all who knew him. He had a tall, commanding figure which displayed unusual athletic power, and Bridget glanced at him not only with gratitude but admiration, as lost in profound meditation, and with Shelah lying on his shoulder, he walked onwards with long swinging steps, his head erect and well thrown back, affording full play to the vigorous lungs encased in his broad manly chest, where beat a heart of gold which still pulsated with as generous a warmth, as though it had never experienced one of the bitterest pangs it could have been called upon to endure—its faithless betrayal by her it had trusted above all others.

As Captain Carmichael, fearful of disturbing Shelah's slumbers, pursues his way in silent

thought, a few words can put the readers *au fait* of his history up to this point.

Between him and one of Lord Melville's daughters an engagement had been allowed to exist for some time, only in consequence of the young man being the supposed heir of a millionaire uncle. This man, who was a miser and a misanthrope, took apparently the deepest interest in his nephew's welfare. Everybody from this naturally concluded that his future was brilliantly secured. He himself laughingly declared he would not take a million for his certainty of succeeding to old Mr. Hardy's fabulous wealth, while in his generous mind he had formed all sorts of quixotic plans for employing that wealth for the benefit of others when he became its possessor.

Alas! for the uncertainty of the most apparent certainties in this life. 'Old Hardy,' or 'Old Skinflint,' as he was generally called, died suddenly, left five thousand pounds to Captain Carmichael, and, never having given a sixpence in charity during his long and worthless life, bequeathed the whole of his enormous wealth to hospitals and almshouses, all of which were

to be associated with his own name ; thus ensuring its undying memory in this world, and compounding for the repose of his soul in another. At least, such was his consoling thought in death.

For a very short time, Hugh Carmichael was completely overpowered by his disappointment, a cruel and bitter one to him, but more deeply felt, as it might possibly include the loss of her he loved, for he was well aware that upon his succeeding to his uncle's riches depended Lord Melville's consent to their marriage. Of *her* love and faith he did not entertain the slightest distrust. Such entire confidence made the awakening more bitter.

Clasping her in his arms, he revealed his misfortune to Miss Melville, and proposed in passionate words of pleading that they should brave the world together, urging that he could leave the Guards, and exchange into a regiment quartered in India, where they might live happily on a small income, since he himself only cared for the loss of riches on her account. Like ice her answer dropped on his trustful heart. Covering her face with her hands, through which tears

of mortification and worldly disappointment more than of sorrow fell, she murmured, That her father would never consent to such a separation from his favourite daughter—that to be parted from her own family, from the country and society to which she was accustomed ‘would kill her.’ And with angry bitterness she added that Mr. Hardy was a wicked, unprincipled old wretch, who she hoped was reaping the fruits of his ill-deeds in another world for having so deceived them both.

As Hugh Carmichael, in agonised astonishment, listened to these words proceeding from a cold, worldly heart, he bitterly recognised that he had been worshipping at a false shrine; but he was a proud man, and finding that Lord Melville’s doors were henceforth closed against him, that no relenting sign or word came from Miss Melville, he went his way and made no second pleading. Shortly afterwards she married for wealth and rank, nor did he cull any consolation from that last letter, in which she implored him still to remain her friend, vehemently asserting—what was false—that she was marrying by compulsion, and in accordance with

her father's desire. At the same time she assured him she could never love another as she had loved him, and implored Hugh not to judge her harshly.

Scornfully he tore this letter into atoms. It pained him immeasurably to be forced to despise the woman he had so passionately loved. To the nobility of his mind there was positive horror in the thought of what the future had in store for one whose marriage vows had been so falsely uttered, and he considered she was committing the greatest sin a woman could commit.

Disappointment and sorrow are, however, powerless to embitter a noble nature. Secure of a large fortune, happy in his love, with no impetus for self-exertion, Captain Carmichel had hitherto been but one of this world's triflers. When his dream of happiness was so rudely broken, he suddenly woke to clearer, higher views of life's responsibilities. What he now craved for was action—work for others. With the enthusiasm of youth he longed for war to break out, for battle-fields whereon he might win honour and fame. Ambition, but a noble one,

had taken the place of a softer passion. Pending the contingency of war, which seemed a very remote probability, he had undertaken to help his friend, Lord Ballina, in abating some of the misery in Ireland caused by the terrible famine of 1846 and '47. He had long been weary of the round of London gaieties, and now he realised that the chain which had so long bound him to this futile and useless life had been a worthless affection.

When we begin to dissect our past feelings and passions it is a sure proof that their influence is on the wane. Hugh Carmichael's love for Mabel Melville was indeed dead; but yet, as he trudged through the rain with little Shelah reposing so trustfully on his shoulder, the remembrance of the past, when that love was fresh and living, a part of his very soul, stole over him, causing him to murmur sadly to himself,

'Poor Mabel, I wonder if she is happy. God grant she may be.' He looked down on the sleeping child as he thus reflected, and smiled at her beauty. Her fair hair lay scattered over his shoulder, while through her parted, rosy lips the breath came softly. 'What a lovely

‘fairy she is!’ he whispered. ‘A fit representation of Psyche. Ah! pretty one, I hope you have not been sent into this world to vex men’s hearts; but, like your beautiful mother, to be the guardian angel of one happy individual.’

The sound of wheels in the distance roused Captain Carmichael from his meditation respecting Shelah’s future destiny, while Bridget exclaimed, joyfully,

‘Blessed be the holy saints; here’s the carriage for Miss Shelah.’

Looking in the direction where Bridget pointed, Captain Carmichael perceived a small vehicle on two wheels drawn by a rough pony, and approaching at a smart pace. This conveyance—it could not be dignified by the name of carriage—was an inside or covered car, and though by no means either a luxurious or lordly carriage, served its purpose equally well.

As soon as it halted, a remarkably handsome man of splendid physique—for he was considerably over six feet—jumped out, exclaiming,

‘In with you, Bridget. I fear Miss Shelah must be wet through. But where on earth is she?’

‘Papa, papa. I’m here, and quite dry. And here is Mr. Hugh also—and he has brought the money,’ called out Shelah, all in a breath, from beneath the umbrella, which had hitherto prevented both her and Captain Carmichael from being recognised by Lord Ballina, who now exclaimed,

‘Why, Hugh, my dear fellow, is it you? Only seeing your legs, I took you for the game-keeper. What a pleasure to see you once again. You bring a whiff of civilization from over the water, and a breath of consolation to us starving barbarians! But what has brought you and this elf into such strange juxtaposition?’ he asked, taking Shelah into his arms, and then shaking hands with his friend.

‘I’ll tell you, papa. Mr. Hugh took me out of a bog-hole.’

‘So it appears, my darling, from the state of your frock; but we will hear all about your adventures later. You must get home at once, for your mother is seriously anxious about you.’

The word ‘mother’ seemed to have a magical effect upon Shelah, for though burning with impatience to detail all her adventures to her

father, she curbed the impetuous desire, and, without another word, allowed Lord Ballina to place her in the car; only putting out her pretty head to say,

‘Good-bye, Mr. Hugh. We shall have tea ready for you when you arrive. I am so very much obliged to you for carrying me. I hope you won’t be very tired.’

The young man laughingly kissed his hand towards the child’s beaming face, amused at the idea that such a feather’s-weight as hers could be the slightest tax on his muscular powers of endurance.

CHAPTER III.

As Lord Ballina's primitive and only carriage was being driven rapidly away, much to the discomfiture of Captain Carmichael's dog, who barked out his disappointment at the sudden disappearance of his pleasant companion, he turned to his friend and observed, with a humorous smile,

‘My landau will not hold us all. But, as you are already nearly wet through, a little more soaking can do you no harm. I am too true an Irishman to heed our weeping climate.’

‘Your climate is decidedly dampish, Dermot. You are right; I infinitely prefer walking, under present circumstances, and, by so doing, I shall have ample opportunity of admiring your native scenery.’

‘Don't be sarcastic, Hugh. If the sun elects to honour us to-morrow, you will be forced to

admit that there is somewhat in our scenery to gratify even your fastidious English eyes.'

'Climate and scenery seem equally to agree with you, Dermot. Your appearance is enviably fresh and robust, notwithstanding the troublous times and grievous sights amongst which your fate is at present cast.'

'These are indeed harassing times. If food for the body is wanting, there is plenty for the mind, and accompanied by such imperative necessity for active work as tends to keep a man from vegetating even in these wilds.'

'Well, I have come to help in this work, and, by so doing, to drive away selfish brooding over the inevitable, until I go abroad with my regiment. For my exchange from the Guards is effected. In six months I trust to be in India.'

'Poor old Hugh. You have been shamefully ill-treated.'

'Stop that, Dermot. I like pity less than most men. My wounds are healed, their scars will soon be invisible. I have lost a fortune, but I intend to make one, and a name also.'

'Bravely said. And find a new love into the bargain, I trust.'

‘Or do without one. My profession is my sole love now, and likely ever to remain so. As to the loss of riches, looking as I do upon this disappointment philosophically, it has its use by demonstrating what is one’s exact value in this world’s estimation, and who are one’s true friends.’

‘I only hope old Hardy is getting it hot in the next world. And, as to the London world, I would not give that for its friendships,’ replied Lord Ballina, snapping his fingers contemptuously in the air. ‘Why, I believe all my old chums except yourself have forgotten me as completely as though I had no existence. Would you credit that, the last time I was in London, Caversham, who was my closest friend in the Guards, when we met, extended me two fingers, saying, languidly, “Hullo, old fellow, alive still. I should have thought that exile in that hole, Ireland, would have killed you long ago.”’

‘Not a warm greeting, certainly. But you forget you were his successful rival in Helen’s affections,’ replied Captain Carmichael, smiling. ‘But indeed, Dermot, I require no compassion

I breathe more freely than I have done for many a long day. I have been a double slave, inasmuch as I was dependent on the caprices of a hypocritical miser and a shallow, faithless-hearted woman. I am now my own master. But enough of self. What a sweet and lovely child that is of yours, and so intelligent and original. She has already extended to me her sympathy, and calls me "poor Mr. Hugh."

'She *is* a peculiar child,' replied the father, in a tone of deep tenderness. 'Helen says I spoil her; perhaps I do, but then there is always the mother's judicious influence to counteract any weak indulgence on my part. But my excuse for such indulgence is that Shelah was dangerously ill a short time back. We had allowed her to mingle too much amongst our poor starving tenantry, forgetful that a child so impressionable and so young was unfit to bear the strain of such terrible scenes as she witnessed daily. But she always begged so earnestly to be allowed to accompany her mother on her errands of mercy, that Helen did not like to prevent her following the promptings of her soft little heart. Finally one day, after reading

the Bible with her mother—desirous, as we suppose, to literally fulfil its precepts—she stole away with bare feet, carrying her little shoes and stockings in her hand as a gift to a poor, sick child of her own age. When she arrived at the cabin where it dwelt the child was dead, and so great was the shock to our darling that she fell dangerously ill, and, since her recovery, walks in her sleep, and has to be closely watched.’

‘She is evidently an emotional and imaginative child,’ replied Captain Carmichael. ‘I don’t take to children in general; notwithstanding, your Shelah has quite fascinated me.’

‘So she does everyone. Yet for her own happiness, even young as she is, she takes life too seriously. Though indeed, latterly, there is enough to make us all doubly serious; for the famine-fever, as they term it, has broken out in the village, and we have to be more careful than ever of our darling; for, as you know,’ added the father, pathetically, ‘she is our only one.’

As Lord Ballina spoke, the dark shadow of some still unspoken fear passed over his usually

cheerful countenance. This was quickly observed by his friend, who replied, sympathetically,

‘You are indeed right to be careful of your charming Shelah. But do your fears travel no further? How about yourself and Helen?’

Lord Ballina started painfully as he answered, quickly,

‘For myself I have never a thought. For her I am in daily, hourly dread. Nothing deters Helen from entering the most infected, famine-stricken household. Where I go, she affirms, she can follow.’ Lord Ballina stopped; then, in a voice of quivering emotion, added: ‘On her account, Hugh, I suffer pangs of anxiety untold. But I dare not assert my marital authority. I dare not show my fear, for I know it is her unshrinking courage, her noble example, combined with the adoration with which she has inspired the most affectionate and long-suffering peasantry in the world, that has prevented them from sinking into abject despair.’

As Lord Ballina ceased speaking, the two friends were entering the plantation of firs which his little daughter had already pointed out to Captain Carmichael, and, by the

gentle splash of waters breaking on a shingly shore, he recognised he was near a lake. In a few moments it opened out to indistinct view, for the heavy falling rain obscured its more distant outlines.

After following its shores for a short distance, a sudden turn in the road brought them opposite a pair of handsome gates, giving entrance into Ballina Park: these being thrown open by a very old woman, they ascended a gently-rising approach, the ill-kept condition of which testified to the impecuniosity of the unfortunate possessor of the land.

After his last words Lord Ballina had become silent, and was evidently plunged in painful thought. By giving expression, for the first time, to his conjugal fears, they had gained renewed strength, for he loved his wife with all the ardour and passion of an impetuous, warm Irish nature; and well she merited that love, for hers, equally strong, had redeemed him from a career of reckless, selfish indulgence that had greatly contributed to impoverish the family estate, already deeply encumbered by his father's extravagant habits and fatal adherence

to an overwhelming passion for play. The old lord had been, in fact, a confirmed gambler. Remarkably handsome, sparkling over with Irish humour, full of health and spirits, kindly and generous, but weak of purpose, he had been wholly swayed by those with whom he habitually associated. His son, Dermot Fitz-Maurice, had inherited that fatal love of play which had ruined his father. Happily, however, for him, when he was already past thirty and evil influences appeared in the ascendant, he met Helen Carmichael, a distant cousin of his friend, Captain Carmichael, by whose mother, being an orphan, she had been brought up and educated.

Penniless as she was, a drawback of which Mr. Fitz-Maurice made no account, he fell madly in love with this beautiful Helen, and overcoming her unselfish scruples, and unheeding his father's peevish remonstrances,—who, from his enforced retreat abroad, urged upon his son the necessity of his marrying a woman with money,—he made her he loved his wife, thereby assuring his own happiness and arresting his downward course in life.

There were those who asserted that this

loving pair were lacking in worldly wisdom, and would certainly rue their romantic folly; while Mr. Fitz-Maurice, the young man's uncle and his father's agent, who had trusted to his nephew retrieving the family fortunes by a wealthy marriage, wrote him a letter, not of congratulation but of condolence, on his having metaphorically cut his own throat by his imprudent marriage. He soon had reason to acknowledge his mistake; for, however madly and profusely a man may have scattered his wild oats previous to marriage, if he has never been guilty of any dishonouring or mean action, and if he is gifted with a good heart and generous disposition, his reformation is often secured if he marries a woman he not only loves, but who also inspires him with respect and chivalrous admiration.

Easily influenced, when Mr. Fitz-Maurice found himself wholly separated from baneful companions and in a fresh atmosphere of purity and domestic harmony, he yielded ready submission to the silken reins held by his lovely Helen with so light a hand that he remained unconscious that he was guided by her counsel

in almost every action of his life. When almost immediately after his son's marriage Lord Ballina died, unregretted, abroad, where he was living not too reputably, great was the delight and astonishment of Mr. Fitz-Maurice, his brother, when his successor expressed his intention of residing permanently on his estate.

The old Lord Ballina had been an absentee all his life. But though, like angels' visits, his to his native land were few and far between, they in no way partook of the angelic character, and were equally dreaded both by his kind-hearted agent and his wretched tenantry. Nor was this to be wondered at, for Lord Ballina's visits were simply actuated by an affectionate interest in his exchequer. He came to make perfectly sure that Mr. Fitz-Maurice was placing the screw with sufficient strength on his unfortunate tenantry, and extracting from them the uttermost farthing that could be obtained.

Satisfied of this fact, he bundled hurriedly away in the dark hours of night, being in mortal terror of the curtailment of his wicked old life by some starving and evicted tenant. But he was gathered to his forefathers now, or rather

he was not so honoured, for his body lay in a lonely grave in a distant land; and Dermot, the gay, generous, and well-intentioned, not only reigned in his place, but with much enthusiasm expressed his intention of reigning in person. He fully believed he was himself the originator of this wholesome intention, whereas it was due to Helen's gentle persuasions and wise suggestions.

They were living in London where Lord Ballina had a tiny bijou residence, but he was wholly without occupation, and she prudently reflected that an idle life, devoted lover as he still was, might, if persisted in too long, prove dangerous to their future peace and happiness. Therefore one morning when, after the prolonged and ominous yawn of a completely unoccupied spirit, Lord Ballina observed, lazily, 'I suppose I ought to run over to Ireland and show myself to the tenantry, only I don't like to leave you, Helen;' she replied, quietly,

'Why should I not accompany you? Why should we spend the little money we have in a country where we have neither duties nor responsibilities to fulfil? Why should we not make Ballina our permanent home? Yes, I am

dying to see Ireland,' she continued, as he stared at her in astonishment and in total disbelief of her being in earnest. 'I am sure I should like the country, and, as to the Irish people, have I not proved my appreciation of them in marrying you?' she ended, with a smile.

'Do you mean to say you would bury yourself in Paddy's land? Forsake London for my sake, Helen.'

'Most certainly, with you as the Paddy who accompanies me,' she replied. 'Like Eve, I can say,

"Thou to me all things art under heaven,
All places thou."'

'My Helen, had you been Eve, we should never have been driven out of paradise,' he said, starting out of his indolent, lounging attitude and clasping her in his arms.

'You never paid me a prettier compliment before we were married,' she replied, gently disengaging herself from his embrace; and then, wisely striking while the iron was hot, she added, quickly, 'Then it is decided we take up our residence at Ballina, of which we shall make another Paradise.'

Lord Ballina smiled dubiously; his recollections of his paternal home were anything but exhilarating. Anything less like the Garden of Eden he could not well picture to himself. But if, on her arrival, Helen's heart sank at the comfortless aspect of her new home—a large and handsome house, but from long neglect looking cold and dreary—if for a few moments her spirits drooped at the rushy, swampy state of the beautiful, undulating park, at the glorious but neglected timber and the hopeless condition of the garden, prolific in naught but weeds—and, above all, if she felt bitterly downcast and sorrowful at sight of the miserable state of the peasantry, and the squalid village that almost touched the park gates, she allowed none of these feelings of depression to be apparent before her husband, but resolutely and at once set to work to remedy some of those worst evils surrounding her, evils mainly due to the absenteeism and selfish indulgence in their own pleasures of past owners of the land.

In vain had Mr. Fitz-Maurice, Lord Ballina's uncle, endeavoured to incite the tenantry into some show of enthusiasm in honour of their

lord's return home with his young bride. They had been too long deserted and oppressed to place any faith in the agent's prophecies that better days were in store for them, and remained sullen and impassive. Lord Ballina's newly-formed good intentions for their welfare were considerably cooled by this uncordial reception of himself and his loved Helen.

A less courageous woman than she was would have been equally chilled and discouraged. Lady Ballina was neither. She had quickly read the characters of those with whom she had to deal, for her sympathetic nature understood and realised their past wrongs and sufferings, and she allowed that their present behaviour had every excuse. Her efforts to effect a kindly reformation where it was so much needed were as unflagging as they were judicious. Nor could she in the end fail to succeed, for she worked from the purest and most disinterested of motives—love of her fellow-creatures.

And it was not long before she reaped the reward of such unselfish labours ; for when, at the end of her first year's sojourn at Ballina, Shelah was born, all those welcoming congratulations

which had been refused to the owners of the land on their arrival were lavished upon them with double enthusiasm when this auspicious event was made known. Bonfires were lit on every hill, and when the lovely young mother drove with her infant in her arms through the village, it was beneath garlands and triumphal arches, and to the sound of such cheering as Irish lungs can alone give forth.

All this and a good deal more Lord Ballina retailed to his friend as they walked by a short cut across the now well-drained park, for Captain Carmichael, observing how Lord Ballina's gaiety had flagged as he discussed the events of the painful present, had adroitly turned the conversation into remoter channels.

'And now that you have become, as it were, rooted to your native soil, are you troubled with no longings for past pleasures? have you no desire for a return of those old days of careless ease when "you shone as the glass of fashion and the mould of form"?' inquired Hugh, when his friend's narration was concluded.

'I fear I have occasionally sighed for the flesh-pots of Egypt. And, if it had not been

for Helen, I fear I should never have had courage to face all the worries continually cropping up here. As long as there was a little money coming in, enabling us to carry on improvements, there was some excitement in life. But now all is stagnation, and this year we have had no funds to make our usual trip abroad. Even if we had, Helen could never be persuaded to forsake these starving people. Oh, what a woman she is ! Her perfections are sufficient to atone for all the follies of her weaker sisters.'

'I have always looked upon Helen as the most perfect woman I know ; to me, she stands in the light of a sister.'

'I am aware of this. Your affection for and confidence in each other is mutual. But I hope, Hugh,' added Lord Ballina, with a twinkle in his blue eyes, 'that you will not betray my faint-heartedness to her. The knowledge of my worldly back-slidings would grieve Helen. But here we are, and there she is and Shelah also welcoming us from the window.'

As Lord Ballina spoke, they were passing beneath the drawing-room windows, and, glance-

ing upwards, Hugh saw so fair a picture that it was never effaced from his memory in after years.

Leaning against the window-sill, with a bright smile on her face, stood Lady Ballina, quaintly dressed in an old-fashioned yellow brocade, the bodice only sufficiently open to display her perfect throat. At the back it stood stiffly up in a high collar, forming a charming frame-work for her small head, round which her brown hair was coiled in thick plaits, while in front it was gathered back from her low, broad forehead in pure, straight lines, displaying a countenance which testified not only to intellectual power, but to a soul reposing in that peace which passeth all understanding.

At this moment her arms encircled her little daughter, who was standing on a chair close beside her mother, and peering out into the twilight, in anxious expectation of seeing the pedestrians arrive, for the rain had ceased and the outlook was brighter.

A loving mother's hand had combed the child's fair hair out of its late disorder, and it now fell in luxuriant curls down her pretty

white shoulders, while her broad, blue sash and embroidered frock showed that she was arrayed in gala costume in honour of the coming guest. There was no great likeness between mother and daughter, though in the future Shelah promised to be as lovely a woman as Lady Ballina. In the present moment there was a restlessness in the child's face, an eager excitability totally at variance with the calm serenity of expression reigning on the more matured countenance of her mother.

There was a passionate intensity shining out of Shelah's eyes auguring too surely that she would in the future feel the joys and sorrows of life equally strongly, and suffer accordingly. She possessed something of her father's nervous mobility of character, combined, young as she was, with such a keen sense of right and wrong, and so direct an appreciation of truth and justice, that, however slight the punishment she might receive, she accepted it calmly and obediently when she felt it to be deserved.

Aware of this fact, and also of how frequently sensitive, loving children are driven into open or sullen rebellion when wrongfully

punished, Lady Ballina determined to educate her daughter entirely herself ; and, though she was now close upon eight years old, Shelah had never been subjected to a severer rule than that of a most loving and judicious mother. Happy ! happy for the child had it been ordained that this should ever be her fate.

Just as for the twentieth time Shelah asked Lady Ballina if she thought ‘ Papa and poor Mr. Hugh would ever come,’ the two gentlemen passed the window, and, kissing her hands excitedly to them, she sprang from the chair, and ran towards the door, to be in readiness to greet their arrival. Her mother called her back, saying,

‘ My darling, you must not call Cousin Hugh “ poor Mr. Hugh.” ’

‘ Oh ! but he is,’ replied the child. ‘ I know all about it. His story ended badly ; he told me so himself,’ she added, gravely.

‘ I hardly think his story is ended yet, Shelah,’ replied her mother, smiling. ‘ Fortunately, we can include many stories even in our short lives. And I have no doubt Hugh, who so well deserves it, will have a second, with a brighter ending than his first.’

‘Mamma, have you had more stories than one in your life? And did they all end well?’ asked Shelah, coming close to her mother and looking up earnestly into her face.

‘Shelah, my child, I never had but one story in my life, and the whole of that story was a bright and happy one; and the end brighter than all, for I married your father.’

‘And shall I have a story too, mamma?’

‘Everyone’s life is more or less of a story, my sweet little daughter.’

‘And do you think mine will have a happy ending like yours, or a bad ending like Mr. Hugh’s?’

‘God forbid it should be the latter, my Shelah,’ exclaimed Lady Ballina, clasping the child in her arms and covering her face with kisses.

At the same moment the door opened, and Lord Ballina and Captain Carmichael entered the room. Bounding from her mother’s arms, Shelah flew to her father, to be caressed with equal tenderness, while Lady Ballina came forward to greet her cousin with a sister’s embrace. As they held each other’s hands, she

looked into his eyes with a silent, sympathising glance.

‘Dear Helen, that sweet look of pity is unnecessary. Men have died and worms have eaten them; but not for love. Believe me, I am heartwhole.’

CHAPTER IV.

IF Captain Carmichael had been charmed on the evening of his arrival by the simple grace and harmony of colouring which Lady Ballina's drawing-room displayed, evincing what cultured taste and a refined mind can effect, even where money is lacking, he was equally gratified when, on awakening the following morning to peals of childish laughter re-echoing beneath his window, he looked out on as fair a scene as the eye could wish to dwell upon.

A terraced garden still brilliant in varied colours, for as yet its flowers were but slightly touched by autumn frosts, led down by a double flight of stone steps to a lake of considerable size, lying blue and motionless beneath the dancing sunlight and azure sky; for the climate of Ireland is as variable in its moods as the character of its inhabitants, and the

morning was as bright and cheering as the afternoon had been gloomy and dispiriting.

Some very fine beech trees, their bronze and golden foliage already giving token of the approaching autumn, overhung the lake, wherein their gorgeous colouring was reflected. Nearer a horse-chestnut flaunted its almost scarlet leaves upwards in vivid contrast to the blue sky, while amongst its still luxuriant foliage a robin, that philosophical bird to whom all seasons seem alike, warbled its gladsome salute to the brilliancy of the opening day, in happy indifference to a certain crispness in the air, evidence that summer was over and that morning frosts were aiding to beautify woods and forests.

Though the banks of the lake rose but slightly from the water's edge, they were thickly wooded, and indented by the small bays and promontories breaking its outline ; while numerous were the islets reposing on its placid bosom, so that the beholder of this smiling view could not fail to be struck with admiration of a landscape that without boasting of any grandeur was yet supremely soft and lovely.

One of the islands especially attracted Cap-

tain Carmichael's attention. Larger than the others, it was rendered still more conspicuous from its centre being occupied by an ancient, ruined castle surrounded by a group of ilexes. The two towers of this old and crumbling building were entirely mantled with ivy and crimsoning virginia creeper, and rose in unequal height from amidst the more sombre foliage surrounding them.

Observing that Lady Ballina was already in the garden busily occupied amongst her flowerbeds, Captain Carmichael hastened his toilette, in order to join her. Shelah, whose merry laughter had helped to arouse him, was nowhere visible, but, a second peal of childish mirth causing him to glance outwards, he perceived what accounted for her merriment. She was dancing with his dog, whose forepaws she tightly held. On his head she had tied her hat, and about his neck was knotted a blue handkerchief. Round and round she valed in the exuberance of childish delight, careless that her partner's pleasure was evidently of a more modified nature.

Suddenly struck by some fresh idea, she re-

leased the dog, and ran with all speed down to the lake; her play-mate, exulting in release, bounded after her, barking with excitement at the prospect of a possible swim in the tempting Ballina waters.

But Shelah was intent on other and more personal considerations. She had recognised approaching in the distance her friend Mick's boat, laden with the produce of his early fishing.

Even from his window Hugh could plainly discern the silvery sheen of the fish lying in the stern of the little boat.

Waving her hands imperiously, the child beckoned the fisherman in shore: an order immediately complied with. For a few seconds an animated colloquy took place between them. There was clearly a difference of opinion between the two, decided in Shelah's favour; for in another moment, Captain Carmichael, to his great astonishment, saw her, all hatless and cloakless as she was, jump into the boat, and taking possession of one of the oars, which she evidently well knew how to handle, make for the island which had so attracted his attention.

Dismayed at being so faithlessly deserted, the

dog ran up and down the bank for a few moments howling reproachfully, and then, plunging into the water, swam gallantly after the boat, still wearing Shelah's hat on his head.

'My hat! My hat! Look, Mick, look!' she screamed, with a peal of laughter, caught up from the island by an echo, so clear and oft repeated, and which, floating over the lake, died away in the far distance with such soft cadence, that it appeared as though the island were inhabited by a hundred mocking fairies.

The scene was altogether so pretty and idealistic, and yet contained so comical an element that Hugh laughed with pure pleasure at being a witness thereof.

Lady Ballina, who, with hands shading her brow, was watching her daughter's movements, heard him, and, looking up, called to her cousin to join her. He quickly complied, exclaiming, as she came forward to meet him,

'Helen, I no longer wonder at your affection for this place, though you are an Englishwoman.'

'But my heart has long been wholly Irish, Hugh. This is, emphatically, home, sweet home to me, for it contains all that I hold dearest in

life. I call this garden my haven of repose. It contrasts, so sadly, with all the misery existing in the village and its vicinity. But we make a point of never discussing here those events which so largely occupy our time and thoughts outside its precincts.'

We shall follow Lady Ballina's example, and, as this is not an Irish tale, assure our readers that they will not be harrowed by any descriptions of that terrible famine of years gone by, except as, in its consequences, it so materially affected the fortunes of our heroine.

'To-day I think you must devote yourself to Dermot,' continued Lady Ballina. 'And later on, when my labours are over, I will join you on the lake.'

'Your little daughter has already embarked, I observe. You are a courageous mother to trust her with an oar at her tender age.'

Lady Ballina smiled as she answered,

'Shelah can swim like the wild ducks of the lake, and then, unless she is with us, we never trust her in a boat except with Mick, who saved her life once, on these very waters, when in a sudden squall our boat was upset.'

‘This accounts, I suppose, for their friendship?’

‘Yes, and also for my determination to allow her all the freedom of a boy in outdoor sports. Living on a lake, as we do, had I given in to maternal fears, my life would have been a daily torture, while she would have been deprived of the chief enjoyment that she can have here. It was a struggle to make up my mind to do this. And I had a hard battle to fight with Dermot. He perfectly adores our child, and, I fear, spoils her not a little,’ added Lady Ballina, thoughtfully.

‘Which is of no consequence, my dear cousin, for he tells me that your judicious influence counteracts the effects of his spoiling.’

‘But she may be deprived of that influence one day.’

Captain Carmichael started, and looked anxiously in his cousin’s face.

‘Oh! don’t look so alarmed,’ she said, with a placid smile. ‘I am no sentimentalist, alluding in mystic terms to my fancied early demise. But everyone should be prepared for the uncertain future, where those they love are concerned, though this is a subject upon which I dare not

touch with Dermot. He shrinks from all allusion to the possibility of our ever being separated. Death for me, he always maintains, means death for him also. You know his character, so joyous, so careless always of the future. And then to speak to him of my fears for Shelah's future if I were not near her, looks as though I mistrusted him. Ah, Hugh, I don't mistrust his loving, generous heart. But the impulse of his excitable nature, unguided by sober judgment, this does cause me anxiety. I feel as if I must open out my heart to some one, and who fitter than you to give me counsel? who more worthy to receive my confidence?

‘Dearest Helen, how can I aid you?’

‘Have you forgotten you are Shelah's god-father?’

‘A relationship which means but little in these days, beyond the gift of a very useless article of plate, or a superfluous Bible.’

Helen smiled as she replied,

‘But I wish you not only to dignify this relationship, but also, in view of the uncertainty of everything in this world, to be her guardian. Will you promise me this? I have not the

slightest doubt that Dermot would wish it also, for he has the greatest esteem as well as affection for you.'

'I will promise anything you wish, Helen. But, thank God, as you and I are nearly of an age, and Dermot but ten years our senior, I am very unlikely to be called upon to fulfil this office. Strange to say, I had quite forgotten I had the honour of being Queen Shelah's god-father.'

'Now that you realise this fact, I hope you will use all the influence such a relationship affords you, and I consider it a very serious one, for her welfare both in the present and hereafter. My child has all her father's excellent qualities, his truthful, impulsive, and generous nature. Yet from her quick sensibilities, her keen affections, I sometimes fear that, unguided, she may allow the dictates of her loving heart to outweigh her more practical good sense; dear Dermot does so often. It seems like sacrilege to discuss, even with you, the husband who is all in all to me. But the very kindness of his heart is a snare to Dermot. I know too well he has long wearied of the monotony of life

which our lack of rents has lately entailed upon us here, though for my sake he strives to overcome this feeling. But I firmly and sadly believe that if anything were to happen to me he would leave this place at once. Poor little Shelah, it would break her heart to be rudely transplanted from her kingdom. As you seem already to know, the people about here generally call her Queen Shelah.'

Tears were in Lady Ballina's eyes as she spoke.

'Helen, Helen! what is the meaning of your talking like this? I am sure you are not well. You go too much amongst these famine-stricken people. Is it right for you as a mother and wife to risk your invaluable life as you do?'

'I run no risk. Nothing can be plainer than my duty is here. Duty is a wholesome, if stern guide, whose lamp lightens our path in life, making every fresh step we take, however painful, easier to tread.' There was a beautiful light in Lady Ballina's eyes as she continued, with increased exaltation, 'And yet, when we have done this in truest faith, we must ever fall short of our great Example. But self-sacrifice is the

rule by which He judges of our love for Him.'

'Dear Helen, you silence me,' exclaimed Captain Carmichael, taking her hand in his and kissing it.

She smiled.

'Silence means consent. But, indeed, you need have no fear for me, dear Hugh, I am perfectly well. Perhaps latterly I have felt a little languid and mentally weary. I am slightly dispirited by the constant sight of the misery around us. But your arrival, and the needful supplies you bring, will cheer us all up. Hush! not a word at present to Dermot on the subject we have been discussing. Here he is.'

Looking like some glorious Viking of old, Lord Ballina approached, his golden curls and wavy beard still glittering with diamond drops from the lake, in which he had been disporting himself, as was his custom every morning before breakfast.

'What plot of dire blackness are you two hatching?' he inquired, merrily. 'You have both the guilty look of conspirators. I have no doubt you have been discussing my many shortcomings. Don't look alarmed, I shan't inquire.

My confidence in you is unshakable. But, Hugh, you have brought your lazy London habits with you. You ought to have been in the lake long ago.'

'You will quickly find me a reformed character. With such a lovely scene as this to rejoice in, it would be a crime to stay in bed.'

'I suppose it is very beautiful to a fresh eye. But one may get slightly satiated even with a lovely view ;' and, as Lady Ballina stooped to pick up her flower-basket he added, *sotto voce*, 'I confess I feel so occasionally, and long for the sound of cab and omnibus rattling over London stones.'

Helen had overheard this remark, and, looking up with deepening colour, observed softly,

'It is only occasionally, very occasionally, that these longings seize him, Hugh.' Then twining her arm in her husband's, she urged them to come at once to breakfast, observing, 'We are late this morning, and I have much work before me. You, Dermot, must have a whole holiday and devote yourself to amusing Hugh.'

As they walked towards the house, Captain

Carmichael thought he had never seen a handsomer couple, but, though in outward bearing they were so admirably matched, he well knew how in loftiness of soul and mind Helen towered above her husband.

‘Good heavens!’ he mentally ejaculated, ‘what would he be without her? What sort of a guide would he be for that sensitive impressionable child? But why dwell on so painful an idea? Helen has a splendid constitution. She simply wants a change, and has been too exclusively chained to the oar of duty.’

Lord Ballina’s joyous laugh startled Hugh out of what was becoming a painful reverie. Sheilah was the subject of conversation. Lady Ballina had inquired of her husband if he had seen their little daughter that morning.

‘I heard the darling, but did not see her. She was on the Banshee’s island, which seemed in reality to be peopled with those mysterious beings, so merrily did it re-echo with her laughter. You don’t know, perhaps, Hugh, that our princely race is honoured by having a ghostly appendage attached to it in the shape of a hideous old

woman. We boast, in fact, of owning a family Banshee, who is supposed to reside on yonder island.'

'It makes your *entourage* perfect. I hope I shall see or hear the old lady,' replied his friend.

'I hope you won't do anything of the kind, my dear fellow, for her cry heard three times forebodes certain death to the heads of our house. I mean, of course, to the male head,' he added, quickly.

'Just as much to me as to you, dearest,' observed Lady Ballina, with an incredulous laugh.

'Nothing of the kind,' answered her husband, sharply. 'Women don't count in these traditions. Not, of course, that I attach the slightest importance to such rubbish.'

Even though Lord Ballina thus slightly alluded to the tradition which he affected to despise, there was something in his manner which betrayed it had weight with him. But he continued, lightly,

'I have never heard or seen the lady myself, though I was here when my grandfather died.

Upon which occasion, however, Mick declares she made night hideous with her unearthly squalling. It was also asserted that she made herself heard when my father died. Clever of her to know anything about this event, inasmuch as his death took place in Italy.'

'Do you believe in this evil propheticess, Helen?' inquired her cousin, a little eagerly.

'You know I have no superstitions, Hugh. But I respect those of others, and I find it impossible to eradicate the belief of the peasantry in this long-credited family tradition. Moreover, the belief in the Banshee is very general in Ireland. Though all these mysterious cries are easily to be accounted for by the wonderful echo proceeding from the old castle on the island. Hark! Listen to that dirge-like cry now,' she exclaimed.

Both Lord Ballina and Hugh started as a wail loud and clear rose from the island and swept across the lake, dying away in saddest moaning on the opposite shore. Lord Ballina changed colour, as they all three simultaneously remained still and in complete silence listened to this weird cry. Before it had quite died away, he

stamped his foot impatiently on the ground, saying,

‘Pshaw! It is some one hailing the ferry-boat from the other side of the lake. Let us hasten in to breakfast.’

‘I hope Shelah has not heard it,’ observed Lady Ballina, anxiously. ‘The family legend has taken a terrible hold of her little mind lately, and she has awoke more than once in the night calling out that the Banshee was screaming outside her window.’

‘A nightmare, of course,’ observed Lord Ballina, hastily. ‘Mick and Bridget have been filling the child’s head with ghostly yarns which must be put a stop to.’

They were entering the house by the garden door as he spoke, and at the same moment Bridget came out with a scared and white face.

‘Did you hear it, my lord?’ she said, in a whisper, as he passed. ‘Ay, and Miss Shelah heard it too last night. But it must be three times—three times. May the Blessed Vargin strike her dumb ere that.’

‘Hold your idiotic tongue!’ angrily responded Lord Ballina. ‘It is time Miss Shelah came

home. You leave her too long by herself, Bridget.'

The woman looked up with tears of reproach in her eyes as she repeated,

'Leave her too long! Och, och, my lord, that's a bad saying. Is it me who would give my heart's blood for her—that thinks of her night and day—that has nursed her in sickness and health——'

'Well, well, I know all that, my good Bridget. Only for heaven's sake don't maunder any more about that cursed Banshee. Go down to the lake, row yourself across to the island, and bring Miss Shelah back.'

'Bring Miss Shelah back! When once she gets to that blessed island, what with the dragons and the sharks, and Mick's palaver, it's nothing but the saints above that will get her back.'

'You must assert your authority,' said Lord Ballina, laughing at the astonishment displayed on Captain Carmichael's face at Bridget's marvellous announcement of dragons and sharks existing on the island.

These, he had to explain, were dragon-flies

and pike, one side of the island being a famous spot for catching these fresh-water sharks, while bright-winged dragon-flies sported and flitted about in numbers close to the water's edge.

In the meanwhile, Bridget was walking slowly and reflectively down to the lake. A deep look of pain rested on her honest face as she kept muttering,

‘Three times—three times it must be. Oh! Holy Mary, keep her silent. Keep the trouble away from me darling now and ever!’

She looked up as she uttered this devout prayer, and saw the boat containing her charge leisurely returning.

‘My authority!’ she jerked out, humorously. ‘It is the whip hand of me she has, and the darling knows it. And it’s that villain Mick, bad luck to him, that encourages her.’

CHAPTER V.

DURING breakfast Captain Carmichael's gloomy forebodings were completely laid aside. The pallor of Lady Ballina's cheek had given place to a fine colour, and she appeared in brilliant spirits. If these were forced, the subterfuge was so ably carried out that neither his warm friendship nor her husband's deeper love pierced through that veil of assumed gaiety by which she so frequently strove to conceal her occasional fits of depression or her graver thoughts.

Lord Ballina, on the contrary, was silent, and evidently dejected. The fact was, though he would never acknowledge it, the family legend worried and disturbed him. If he had no deep belief in the existence of the Banshee, he, nevertheless, disliked and shrank from any allusion to this topic. Everyone on his estate believed more or less firmly in the family tradition, which

had existed long before the new house had been built by his great-grandfather, indeed from time immemorial. To ignore it was impossible ; but he preferred it never being made a matter of discussion in his presence.

His reprobate father had a still greater dislike to it being ever alluded to, though he professed the most profound contempt for what he termed a childish legend. But he had a horror of the word death being mentioned in his presence, and the childish fable was too closely connected with the dreaded word for him to find it a palatable subject of discussion.

Having failed to observe how that weird cry, just heard, had disturbed his host, and aware that Helen was wholly devoid of superstition, Hugh, who took considerable interest in tracing out the origin of ghost stories and family legends, observed, as he rose to get a second cup of tea from his hostess.

‘I have often heard of your Irish Banshees, Helen, but never anticipated making so close an acquaintance with one of these mysterious beings as I have done to-day. And her existence so greatly enhances the romance of this place, that

I trust the prevailing distress will not induce her to emigrate, like so many of the other inhabitants of this unfortunate isle.'

'I wish to heaven she would,' exclaimed Lord Ballina, hastily, looking up from the letter he was reading. 'It would put an end to a deal of superstitious rubbish. Why, I can't get a human being to go on the island after dark, and nothing would induce Shelah to visit it alone.'

'Poachers are not disinclined, I fancy, to roam there at night,' observed Lady Ballina, smiling.

'You are evidently a complete unbeliever, Helen,' observed her cousin. 'Have you ever been on the island yourself during the witching hours of darkness?'

'I have, which is quite sufficient,' replied Lord Ballina, in a vexed tone.

'Well, and what happened? Did you see *her*?' asked Hugh, in a mocking voice of awe.

'Pshaw!' peevishly responded his host. 'As I landed, a boat put hastily off from the opposite side of the island; I distinctly heard the rustling sound made by the keel as it was being propelled through the reeds and rushes, while the sleeping wild duck, alarmed by the noise, rose

en masse. I ran round as fast as legs could carry me towards the spot, but unfortunately stumbled, and fell, spraining my foot, and thus the rascals had time to escape. I have been there often again at night, but I have neither seen nor heard anything.'

'But I have been frequently awoke at night by the firing of a gun from the island,' observed Lady Ballina, silyly. 'It is strange, however, that to-day is the first time since I have been here that I have heard the echo from the island vibrating so wonderfully clearly through the air.'

'Unbelieving woman!' exclaimed Hugh. 'You entirely destroy my romance by assuming that that weird cry was nothing more than the echo of some vulgar human voice.'

'Of course it was nothing more,' she answered, cheerfully, as she rose from the table. Passing behind him, she whispered: 'Pray assume the same, and allude no more to this subject in Dermot's presence. It has the power of greatly disturbing him.'

Lady Ballina moved to the window, and Hugh followed her, replying,

‘I shall do as you desire, but surely it would be better to laugh Dermot out of a superstition in which he can have no sound belief.’

‘We may ridicule the very superstitions that, notwithstanding, have an unacknowledged but powerful influence over us. It is one of those questions about which it is impossible to argue,’ replied Lady Ballina, who was gazing out of the window in anxious expectation of seeing her child’s return.

She longed to ascertain if she had heard the cry which had startled, without alarming, herself; for, though physically courageous, Shelah was deeply imbued with belief in the legend, and her mother had been wholly unable to shake the child’s rooted belief in and fear of the ill-omened propheticess supposed to be linked to their house.

In the past she had listened by the hour, with wild, startled eyes and in breathless attention, to Mick’s gruesome tales of all the sorrow the Banshee’s dreaded cry had ever entailed on her ancestors, and when at last Lady Ballina had discovered what a tenacious hold these legends had over her little daughter’s mind, accounting for her disturbed sleep, and, at times, sad coun-

tenance, she sternly forbade their repetition. But it was too late to annul the mischief already accomplished, and Lady Ballina could only trust that advancing years and increased wisdom would weaken the evil impression made.

Lady Ballina would never have allowed her child to run wild as she had done, and still did, had it not been for the doctor's grave assurance that, in order to counteract the effect of her nervous and over-sensitive organisation, and to give her that mental and physical vigour so necessary to ensure her welfare in after life, it was imperative she should be allowed the freedom and out-door existence of the birds and animals in whose companionship she took such keen delight, and with whose habits she had become perfectly acquainted.

The sight of the first butterfly was an intense joy to Shelah, but, though she loved to chase them, the thought of depriving them of life in order to have a collection to display to others was one from which she revolted; and she had shed tears of passionate sorrow at sight of a box wherein some of her bright friends were impaled and

ticketed, and refused ever again to return to a house where such slaughter had taken place.

As to the birds, she could distinguish the note of each separate songster, and would often, with the agility of a squirrel, climb up the branches of a tree, and, nestling among the leaves, whistle in such perfect imitation of thrush or blackbird that the most learned naturalist would be taken in. And how enchanted Shelah would be when this was the case, especially if it were her mother she thus deceived, but even more so if it were her father !

As Lady Ballina continued to gaze out of the window with an anxiety she could not conceal, Hugh observed, gently,

‘ You seem disquieted, dear Helen, yourself. Why, if you are so nervous at your little daughter being on the water, do you permit her to go off alone ?’

‘ She is quite safe with Mick, and in giving her perfect liberty and showing no fear myself, I believe I am acting best for her happiness. Though,’ added Lady Ballina, thoughtfully, ‘ I sometimes have misgivings whether a little

stricter rule may not soon be necessary for my darling. Ah, there she is returning,' she exclaimed, as she caught sight of the boat containing her heart's treasure, gliding swiftly over the water, impelled by Mick's strong arm.

Bridget was standing on the little pier ready, in accordance with Lord Ballina's suggestion, to assert her authority as soon as her young mistress landed. But no sooner had the boat touched the shore than the child sprang out, and, eluding her nurse's grasp, dashed impetuously by her and bounded up the steps towards the house. Lady Ballina hastened out to meet her, followed by Hugh. Mick, a strongly-built, middle-aged man, with a shock of dark, auburn hair, turning grey, shrewd and rather cunning blue eyes, and a comical, yet sensible countenance, stood up in the boat and watched the flying little figure with a sad and anxious gaze, while the dog, who no longer bore Shelah's hat but had consigned it to the lake, rushed wildly after her, deeming she was all for play, whereas Shelah's heart was bursting with grief and terror.

'If you could see yerself, it's a mighty good likeness to an owl blinkin' at the sun ye'd see ;

what are you gaping at, Mick?' said Bridget, with angry scorn. 'It's my pardon you ought to be asking for carrying off the young mistress without hat or cloak this fresh morning, and filling her head with yer bothering tales.'

The fisherman made no reply, but began slowly to fasten up the boat and to remove his basket, containing some splendid spotted trout, on to the grass, previous to carrying them up to the house.

'Is it dumb ye are?' indignantly demanded Bridget.

'I wish the silence of the grave had been me portion before I throubled the Queen's young heart with me stories,' said Mick, unmindful of Bridget's anger, and with his eyes still fixed on Shelah's retreating figure.

'It's late to repent whin the evil's done. But did ye give ear to the cry, Mick?' asked Bridget, anxiety and curiosity overpowering, for the moment, her fierce jealousy of the fisherman's affection for their little mistress.

'Troth, and I did. Bad cess to her troublesome voice. She's like all women, and never knows the right minit to hould her tongue. I

wish mine had been cut out before I tould the Queen onything about the ugly ould witch.'

'Be aisy, Mick. It's best to keep a civil tongue where she's concerned. But did the Queen hear her?'

'Begorra, and she did, and turn'd as white as yer bonnet sthrings, except that the'r a bit yallow and dirty, Bridget.'

'The'r a deal cleaner than yer ugly face anyhow,' tartly rejoined Bridget.

But they were both too absorbed and interested in the main subject of discussion to pursue the personal quarrel, which Bridget's jealous love of Shelah invariably caused to wage between them whenever they came in contact, and as she observed the fisherman making preparations for departure, she said, quickly,

'But, Mick, 'tis only the second time she's yelled out. It may be years, praised be the saints, before we hear her again. Do you give heed, man, to what I'm saying?'

'It may be for years and it may be for ever, than why art thou silent, oh, Kathleen mavourneen?' sang out Mick, shouldering his basket of fish, while with a twinkle in his eye, and pro-

voking irony, he added, 'I lay me life, Kathleen was not long silent. What woman ever was, Mrs. Bridget?'

'It's no more manners than yer own fish ye have, Mick,' replied Bridget, who was now in a towering rage. 'Poor soulless animals. But may be it's a soul yer wanting yerself.'

'Yer right for once, Bridget. Ther's divil a sowl in the basket. The'r all beautifully speckled trout,' he replied, laughing.

But Bridget having fired off her most powerful gun, and knowing she was no match for Mick in a war of words, had beat a retreat, and so his repartee was lost upon the adversary.

'No use argufying with a woman,' he reflected, contemptuously; but he suddenly became grave, as he muttered, 'But she's wrong, the third time is niver long in coming, it was so with the ould lord, and the ould lord's father. Och! but there's sorrow in store for the Queen. And ain't the sperits about? and the fiery signs in the heavens above?'

Mick was here alluding to the Aurora Borealis so seldom seen in all its glory in our latitudes, but which had been lighting up the sky in rosy

splendour for several successive nights, portending, as all the servants in the house as well as the peasantry believed, some dire disaster to the Ballina family.

As Mick, strong in superstitious fears, reached the back entrance to the house, Shelah arrived at the top of the garden steps ; here she remained motionless, with her hand pressed to her panting little heart. With wonderful self-command for so young a child, she was striving to assume a calm demeanour, but her face was colourless, and her dark eyes painfully distended. She was suffering acutely, for she had distinctly heard the dreaded cry, and so had Mick, into whose arms she had fled for comfort, hiding her face in his ragged jacket. Vainly he had endeavoured to persuade her that it was simply the echo raised from the opposite shore ; his words carried no conviction with them, for she saw alarm written on his own face, and she well knew his belief that the Banshee's cry prophesied evil to her family equalled her own. But her mother treated the whole legend with scorn and disbelief, and would gently laugh at Shelah's fears, while her father would be angry with her

for mentioning them. He had been so once before, the only time she had ever experienced a cross word from him.

Poor Shelah ! her heart was bursting with restrained grief as powerful as so precocious and sensitive a nature as hers could be called upon to experience. She could not have told whether she loved her gay, handsome father, or her tender, beautiful mother, most, but she did know that neither she nor her father could do without 'Mamma.'

Large tears were slowly welling into her eyes as, astonished at her immobility, Lady Ballina, accompanied by Hugh, drew near this little statue of voiceless despair. As her mother stooped, and put her arms round the child, Shelah, unable to control her grief any longer, hid her face in Lady Ballina's gown, and burst into an agony of weeping, the cause of which the mother at once divined, and said, in loving reproof,

'My darling, is this the way to greet your new friend ? You have overtired yourself. There, there, look up, here is Cousin Hugh waiting to say good-morning to you.'

In a tone of deep vexation, she whispered to him,

‘ You see the effects of this stupid superstition.]

Looking kindly down on the weeping child, Captain Carmichael observed, cheerily,

‘ Why, Queen Shelah, I am afraid you are faithless. We were the best of friends when we parted last night, and now you will not even glance towards me. And are you aware that I am your godfather, and have to answer for your misdoings, little one?’

He placed his hand on her head as he spoke. Feeling that kindly touch, she was induced to look up timidly through her tears, and, meeting his encouraging smile, a sudden resolution seized her. She would confide her trouble to him who had been so kind to her in her disasters the previous day. Perhaps he could comfort her even now; and, with a brave self-command she held out her hand, saying, with pretty civility,

‘ I hope you slept well, Captain Hugh. Your dog has been out with me. Would you like to walk in the garden?’

There was a sob in her voice as she spoke;

but Shelah felt secure : she had found the friend she required, and was to a certain extent comforted. And, as her mother gave her an encouraging smile, she slipped her hand confidingly into his, and together the young man and the child wandered down into the garden.

Lady Ballina watched them for some minutes. Now that she was no longer on her guard against observation, it was visible from the gravity of her countenance that some secret anxiety weighed heavily on her mind, for, as she slowly turned back towards the house, she murmured, sadly,

‘Yes, it is well to have awakened a fresh interest in Hugh’s heart; and my darling has so evidently taken a fancy to him that, if fostered, such an alliance may prove of immense advantage to both.’

On entering her sitting-room, Lady Ballina sank wearily into a chair, and, passing her hand distressfully over her smooth, white forehead, said, aloud,

‘How strangely weary and laden my brain feels! I feel so disinclined to exert myself. I must be growing lazy. But I must not give in

to vaporous imaginations. "For the night cometh when no man can work."'

She rose as she thus soliloquised, and began to prepare for her usual routine of labour; but started nervously as the door opened, and Lord Ballina hurriedly entered. His manner and face expressed considerable perturbation as he said,

'Helen, you must not go near the Brians' cabin. The children are all down with typhus fever and ulcerated throats. The doctor has just been here, and says the fever is taking the most virulent form, and is terribly infectious.'

As her husband thus addressed her, Lady Ballina turned her head quickly away from him and moved towards the window. He was, therefore, unable to see the sudden rush of blood mounting into her fair face, giving place to as deadly a pallor. But, as she did not reply, he continued, imploringly,

'Promise me, dearest, that no overstrained clinging to duty will induce you to go near them. I shall see they get everything they require.'

He was close to her now, and, laying his

hand on her shoulder, strove to turn her face towards him. There was a moment of breathless silence, and then, in a strangely quiet voice, she replied, with her eyes still averted from his searching scrutiny,

‘I should be acting wrongly by our child, by you, to place myself in the way of known danger when I can be of no use. Send to Father Carey; he will see that the poor Brians want for nothing. And I will desire our village nurse to devote herself more exclusively to these poor sufferers.’

‘My sweet Helen, your compliance with my wishes has relieved me from deadly anxiety. I feared, from your usual disregard of personal danger, your stern sense of duty, you might be induced to resist my mandate.’

‘To do so now would involve both your life and Shelah’s. And when have I ever resisted your mandates?’ she exclaimed, suddenly turning and throwing her arms round his neck with an almost convulsive grasp.

‘Never, never,’ he replied, kissing her passionately, for time and the closest communion of thought and word had only increased Lord

Ballina's deep love for his wife. 'Oh! Helen,' he continued, as her head still lay in loving confidence on his breast, 'what would life be to me without you? A dark and endless blank. And what would become of Shelah? Whither could I turn for counsel in difficulty, for comfort in sorrow?'

'Dearest, you must not make an idol of an earthly love, for such idols may be shattered into dust at a moment's notice. But even if this were so, Dermot, my beloved, there is a Comforter and a Counsellor far more efficient than I can be to you ever close at hand. Oh, that I could make you feel this!'

'Hush, hush, Helen. You are my soul, my religion. The very thought of separation from you is such an agony of suffering to me that I cannot bear to dwell upon it.'

To converse calmly on what must some day be inevitable will not bring it nearer, Dermot.' She raised her head from his shoulder with a heavenly smile. 'But I will not dwell upon that which distresses you; though, when sorrow is so abounding all around us, why should we ex-

pect to be ever exempt from it? But there, go now and see about these poor Brians, and then make arrangements so that the day may pass pleasantly for Hugh. I think his heart is sorer than he will admit, poor fellow.'

As she spoke, Lady Ballina pushed her husband gently, and with well-acted playfulness, towards the door. She wished to be alone. He kissed her again, but this time she seemed hardly conscious of his embrace, and appeared like one in a dream.

But he was too light of heart at her having so readily acquiesced in his wishes to be mindful of the strangeness of her manner, and said, smiling,

'I see you want to get rid of me, you busy one, and plunge into that pile of accounts.'

As the door closed upon her husband, Lady Ballina sank on her knees, and threw her arms up, exclaiming,

'For their sakes, for their sakes. Oh, Father in heaven, spare me. Thou knowest I am ready, but to leave them—to leave them.' Sobs checked her utterance, and, in fear they should

be heard, this loving wife and mother buried her face in the cushions of the sofa in agonising efforts at self-restraint.

Outside, a prolonged peal of childish laughter rose from the garden, and, carried on the wings of the soft western breeze, floated into the room where the poor mother knelt in anguish. Well she knew and well she loved that soft, joyous laugh; to her it was the sweetest music on earth, and, as peal after peal of ringing mirth rose on the air, she moaned aloud in increased sorrow,

‘Oh, blessed years of childhood, when grief however poignant can be so quickly laid aside.’

Great as had been Shelah's trouble, it was evidently for the moment forgotten in the society of her new friend. Hugh's guardianship had already commenced, and as a consoler he had proved all powerful.

But the mother's agony remained unabated, and her tears continued to flow; for she could not disguise from herself that her life, so precious to others, was in deadly peril—that the seed sown by the foul fever-fiend had already taken root in her enfeebled frame. She required no explanation now of the cause of her languor

and unusual depression. For alas! a few days previously she had not only sat a considerable time in the Brians' cabin, but had held one of the children, already—though this was unknown to her—sickenning for death, in her tender motherly arms, while she strove, meanwhile, to lull it to sleep by her melodious singing.

CHAPTER VI.

As soon as she had recovered from the shock caused by knowledge of the danger to which, unwittingly, she had exposed herself, Lady Ballina pursued her usual avocations of daily life with all her wonted serenity. To her husband she breathed no word of the Damocles sword she was too well aware hung over their heads, but, under the plea that she suffered from sleeplessness, changed her bed-room, observing that the doctor advocated fresh surroundings as the best cure for insomnia—an evil she had been much troubled with latterly. It was in dread of conveying to him the poison that was too probably lurking in her own system that she thus, without creating suspicion in his mind, voluntarily separated herself from him. For the same reason she abstained from embracing her child, satisfying Shelah's tender

feelings by saying she feared giving her the cold she thought was hanging about herself, and as, whenever this was the case, Lady Ballina always took precautionary measures on account of Shelah's rather delicate health, her little daughter remained perfectly content.

Having thus done all in her power to avert danger from those she loved, this brave lady calmly awaited the course of events.

But, though to others she was silent, to Hugh she made no secret of her fears, and, if aught could have increased the reverence in which he held her, it would have been the simple but magnanimous manner with which she discussed with him the dire possibilities of the future.

The very day after the fatal discovery that had been made to her, she observed, when they were alone,

‘In cases of this kind, I know too well how quickly delirium may set in, and incapacitate the stricken sufferer from making any request on behalf of even those they love best. I therefore now solemnly adjure you, dear Hugh, to remain ever my child's friend, and Dermot's also,’ she added, quickly; ‘never mind what happens in

the future, remain true to both. Though you are such a young man,' she added, faintly smiling, 'the great difference in your age and that of your god-daughter must, combined with the love and confidence with which you have already inspired her, give you great influence over Shelah.'

In her motherly anxiety, Lady Ballina unconsciously betrayed how weak was her confidence in Lord Ballina's judicious treatment of their child.

Unhesitatingly Hugh accepted the trust confided to him. There was such a deep seriousness in his cousin's words and manner, such a mournful presentiment of approaching evil, that he made no attempt to treat her words lightly, he only sought in every way possible to lead her thoughts into brighter channels.

In the meanwhile, Shelah seemed to pass quite naturally into his almost exclusive care and society, for Lord Ballina had been suddenly summoned to Dublin Castle on political business admitting of no delay. This occurrence had been almost a relief to Lady Ballina, as, no longer trembling beneath the watchful eye of

his love, she could more calmly set her house in order, in view of that solemn call which, with an anguished heart, she realised might be made at any moment.

Therefore, when Hugh and Shelah were on the lake, or he was shooting on the bogs—where his young companion, miserable at the slaughter his unerring gun effected, yet unable to bear separation from her new friend, would sit at a distance, her face buried in her hands that she might avoid seeing the birds fall—Helen, happy in the conviction that she had enlisted Hugh's love and judicious care for her child, was wrestling in prayer, imploring for submission to whatever was appointed, or occupied in writing tender words of love and consolation to her husband and Shelah in the event of her death.

Through all this period of lonely waiting and watching her faith never once wavered, and the perfect calm of her devout soul received its reward, for she was vouchsafed the assurance that, however great might be the trials of her unstable-minded husband and her sensitive, loving child, neither would be forsaken or left unsupported. Such reliance and faith is ac-

corded but to few, perhaps because so few crave for it with the same earnestness of spirit and complete faith as did Helen Ballina.

And thus more than a week passed. Lord Ballina was still detained in Dublin, it must be acknowledged not quite unwillingly. There was a gay party assembled at the Castle, and it was by no means an unpleasant experience to Lord Ballina to find himself again plunged into the midst of a brilliant and fashionable coterie, where his handsome face and Irish humour were duly appreciated by everyone. His satisfaction would certainly have been enhanced had his lovely Helen been present to share in his social triumphs, but, as he could not induce her to accompany him, he was glad she should be at home to entertain the guest he had been forced to desert. He had also recommended Carmichael to the care of his uncle, Mr. Fitz-Maurice, a man of culture and refinement; and, during the absence of her husband, Lady Ballina frequently invited him to meet her cousin, and the two became excellent friends.

Exiled for years in the wilds of Ireland, Mr.

Fitz-Maurice hailed the advent of a man like Captain Carmichael with enthusiasm. Conversation with so congenial a spirit was as refreshing as sparkling champagne might be to one who has long imbibed nothing but the flatest table beer. Hugh entered with the keenest interest into the work he had primarily visited Ireland to carry out, and together with Mr. Fitz-Maurice and Lady Ballina discussed how best they could employ the funds provided by generous English hearts to ameliorate the prevailing destitution in Ireland occasioned by the total failure of the potato crop.

Mr. Fitz-Maurice was blessed, or perhaps burdened would be a more correct term, with a very large family. These young people were much older than Shelah, and were her sole companions, but she did not care much for their society; they were robust, unimaginative children, and had no sympathy with the more poetic side of her character; indeed, in their unspoken thoughts they dubbed her a dreamy little dullard, and when she had spent the day with them it was almost with a sigh of relief that they watched her departure and returned

to those rough sports that had no charm for her.

Since Captain Carmichael's arrival she had, however, completely deserted her cousins' society, having found a companionship infinitely more to her taste. Wherever he went she accompanied him, and had been his guide to every spot of interest in the vicinity of her home. There was one expedition still to be made, some miles off, but it was to be reserved until Lord Ballina's return from Dublin.

The great attraction of this postponed day of pleasure was an ancient and long-disused churchyard, where stood three Irish crosses of great antiquity, held, together with the well in their vicinity, in deepest reverence by the peasantry for miles around. Prayers said at the foot of these crosses procured indulgence for many past offences, however heinous, while a wish breathed during the imbibing of a cup of water from the crystal spring bubbling up from the sacred well was bound to meet with its speedy fulfilment.

Long and ardently had Shelah desired to pay a visit to this miracle-working spot where she had but once before been, and in which she had

the profoundest faith, for on that occasion had not her childish desire met with the desired answer?

Without expressing her reason, Lady Ballina hastened this day's pleasuring, observing to Hugh, two or three days after her husband's departure,

‘I think it would be better for you and Shelah not to wait for Dermot's return, but to take advantage of this lovely day for your pilgrimage to the wishing-well. You might take your luncheon at Mick's cottage, and so break the journey.’

‘But this entails an early start, and separation for the day from you,’ replied Hugh, doubtfully.

‘Mamma, mamma! You must come with us,’ exclaimed Shelah; and, jumping up from her seat at the breakfast-table, she rushed impetuously towards her mother, and made an attempt to embrace her. But, with sudden and nervous energy, Lady Ballina thrust her aside, whilst a spasm of mental agony passed over her face.

‘Oh, mussey,’ cried out the child, with tears in her eyes. ‘Your cold is quite gone, I am sure. Why do you push me away? You are unkind.’

‘Unkind!’ wildly repeated Lady Ballina, seizing her little daughter in her arms, while, with head averted and eyes raised imploringly heavenwards, she clasped her for an instant convulsively to her heart, but as suddenly she released the child, and, springing from her chair, placed a distance between them.

But, during that short moment of irrepressible motherly expansion, Shelah had distinctly heard the loud beating of the fond heart upon which her little head rested; had caught the thrilling repetition of her own word, ‘unkind;’ and never in after years did she forget those sounds, nor that passionate, silent clasp of a mother’s overpowering love, the last she was ever destined to receive.

Though unable to fathom the full meaning of her mother’s impetuous action, and re-assured that there was no abatement of her affection, Shelah felt a little abashed at the petulant word which had escaped her, and looked shyly towards Hugh. But his eyes were gravely fixed on Lady Ballina, who, with her back turned from both, was struggling to recover the self-

possession that had momentarily deserted her. She was the first to speak.

‘Shelah, my darling,’ she said, in a low, gentle voice, ‘you can trust mother, can you not? I fear I have an increased cold. If it were not so, we would cover each other with kisses, and I should accompany you and Mr. Hugh to-day. But I want to try get quite well before papa comes home.’

‘Dear, darling mussey, forgive me,’ said the child, with deep penitence, and coming closer to her mother.

Lady Ballina playfully held her hand out, saying,

‘My sweet Shelah, there is nothing to forgive. There, you may kiss my hand. What a privilege!’

Shelah seized that fair, white hand, and her rosy mouth devoured it with kisses. As she let it go, Lady Ballina dropped it on her head, murmuring, with intense tenderness and deep solemnity,

‘May God’s blessing rest on my little daughter now and for ever.’ Gently motioning She-

lah away, she added, with a smile, 'Now, darling, run and get ready for this all-important pilgrimage. Your wish is, I am sure, already formed, and Hugh's also. But mind they must not be revealed, or the charm is at once broken.'

Desiring to prove her obedience, Shelah flew out of the room, blowing back kisses innumerable to her mother when she reached the door.

Captain Carmichael hesitated, the great emotion he had witnessed in one usually so calm and self-contained had filled him with alarm. But Lady Ballina evidently feared his observation, for, passing hastily from the room, she begged him to order the car at once, saying she must look after the luncheon. Nor did he see her again until, as he and Shelah were driving away, he caught sight of her stately figure standing at the window of the library, from whence she waved her handkerchief to them in token of farewell.

In the same position she remained, motionless as a statue, gazing with mournful prescience on the retreating car, where sat the little figure, conspicuous in its red cloak, that she loved

with every fibre of her heart. Nor did she discontinue her watch until the car had wholly disappeared from sight. When at last she turned away from the window two large tears, the overflowings of a silent and terrible sorrow, slowly coursed down her cheeks. Helen knew that hours of supremest agony lay before her, and that she might never again look on her child's face, unless she passed safely through the ordeal lying before her; for she was assured in her own mind she was sickening for that deadly malady she had contracted when engaged on her errand of mercy in the Brians' cottage.

Passing her hand over her eyes, she rang the bell, murmuring, 'There is still much to be done, I must not give way yet.'

On the servant replying to her summons, she desired the instant presence of Bridget. Quickly the nurse appeared, when Lady Ballina, who had a bundle of letters in her hand, said,

'Give this to Captain Carmichael immediately on his return, and keep Miss Shelah away from me; for, dear Bridget, I fear—I fear I have the fever. I have seen too much to mistake the symptoms.' She placed her hand to her beauti-

ful throat as she spoke. 'Within the last hour I have a choking sensation here. And my throat has been painful all night.'

'God in His mercy preserve your ladyship,' exclaimed Bridget, turning white as death. 'It's me that will nurse ye, if it's stricken with the fever ye are, dear lady.'

'Not so, Bridget. You must remain near Miss Shelah, and I wish you to promise me that, whatever happens in the future, you will never for any consideration be induced to leave my child.'

'May the Blessed Vargin and the holy St. Patrick desert me in the last hour: May I know hunger and thirst in this world, and years of torment hereafter, if ever I desert me darling,' exclaimed the faithful servant, with devout energy, sinking on her knees and raising her hands and eyes with solemn earnestness heavenwards.

'I would believe you on your simple promise, my good Bridget,' replied Lady Ballina, deeply moved, and holding out her hands towards the nurse, who seized and pressed them to her lips and to her heart. Then, rising from her knees with a brave effort to disguise her own fears and

emotion, in order to assure her mistress, she said,

‘But maybe it’s only a bad cowld your ladyship has. And it’s a fright, all for nothin’, yer giving yerself.’

‘The doctor whom I have sent for from Sligo will decide this,’ replied Lady Ballina, with a sad smile. ‘And now leave me, dear Bridget, and obey my orders most strictly. By so doing you can best serve your mistress in the trial awaiting her.’

She gently withdrew her hand from the nurse’s grasp, and Bridget, stunned with grief, turned and silently left the room, but when out of sight and hearing of her mistress she flung her apron over her head, and, swaying her body to and fro, wept aloud, with an impetuosity of grief as genuine as it was demonstrative and energetic, muttering between her sobs,

‘Oh ! me misthress, me sweet misthress. But the third call has not been heard yet, and there’s mercy in heaven above.’

Left alone, with that courage and power of endurance for the sake of others which is the mark of all sublimer characters, Lady Ballina,

notwithstanding she was even now in great bodily suffering, sat down to write to her husband, begging him to return home at once, unless duty imperatively called upon him to remain in Dublin; and, as disturbances were hourly expected there, she thought this might not be improbable. It was an unfortunate clause to have added to her appeal for his return, as she did not state what was her reason for this desire.

‘But why alarm him?’ was her thought, ‘I may be mistaken, after all; and why spoil his pleasure? I shall leave him to imagine it is my love alone that pleads for his presence here. I am sure this will suffice to bring him home.’

It was a cross post from Ballina to the Irish capital, and in these days no telegraphic communication existed between the outer world and the little village where fever and famine were decimating the population.

When Lord Ballina received his wife’s letter, she was already delirious and wholly unconscious of all that surrounded her, while the business which had called him to Dublin, being unfinished, necessitated his remaining there, or,

at least, so he judged, and wrote to this effect in answer to his Helen's too gently expressed desire for his return, adding playfully that he was obeying the call of duty he had learned from her example never to neglect, and therefore she would approve of his conduct.

This letter was never opened. Lord Ballina found it on his writing-table when he ultimately arrived home.

CHAPTER VII.

REASSURED by the smile with which Lady Ballina had speeded their departure, and cheered by the invigorating influences of the brisk, autumnal morning, combined with the gay prattle of his young companion, Hugh endeavoured to dismiss the alarm previously haunting him respecting his cousin's health, feeling sure that had Helen felt any symptoms of illness she would have revealed them to him. Even he had not gauged the depth of her unselfishness. Until certain of having the fatal fever, she would trouble none with the possibility of impending danger.

It was a day of unusual loveliness, and the strong little cob attached to the car, as though inspirited by its brightness, trotted swiftly through the park and by the lake, the stillness of whose waters were undisturbed by a ripple,

except when the wild fowl reposing amongst the reeds and rushes, scared by the approach of the sight-seers, rose in flights to drop down at a safer distance on the lake, and glide out of reach of their enemy—man.

‘Oh, for my gun!’ exclaimed Hugh, with the enthusiasm of the true sportsman, and cocking his stick to his eye as though it were the unerring weapon of destruction he longed for.

‘I am so glad you have no gun, Mr. Hugh,’ observed Shelah. ‘I was so afraid you would bring it.’

‘And it pains you to see the birds fall, little one?’

‘It hurts me here,’ she replied, putting her hand to her heart.

Touched by her action, Captain Carmichael drew the child towards him, saying,

‘Game must be killed, Queen Shelah; and man, being a destructive animal, enjoys such sport. But I love you none the less for your soft feelings. You and I will always be friends, sweet child.’

‘Oh, yes, always—always, Mr. Hugh,’ she repeated, nestling towards him. Suddenly she

looked up, saying, 'I should be so happy—I mean quite happy to-day if dear, beautiful mamma was with us. I wish I had not called her unkind; she never was unkind to me in my whole life, and oh! I love her so much.'

'I think your mother understood it was your love that called forth that word, so you need not fret about it, Shelah. I also wish she was with us.'

'Do you think she has much cold?' asked the child, looking up at him, with her little face full of anxious inquiry.

'Perhaps not, Shelah. But she knows best. Oh, look at that heron!' he exclaimed, suddenly, feeling they were treading on dangerous ground. Anxious to divert the child's thoughts from the subject she had started, he pointed to the picturesque bird in question standing on a large stone close to the lake, in sullen and solemn contemplation of its blue depths. It flew away as they came nearer; but it had offered a fresh channel for conversation, and, as Hugh expatiated on the habits of this bird and others, Shelah became wholly absorbed in the ornithological knowledge he imparted, the

discussion of which occupied their time until they reached Mick's cabin.

It was strange the powerful hold Captain Carmichael had attained over this child's mind during the short space of their acquaintance. Even with respect to the Banshee he had greatly quieted her terrors, not by ridiculing them, but by gently leading her thoughts away from the disturbing topic, and by telling her he was sure that, ultimately, this mysterious cry which so distressed her would be accounted for by natural agency. To try to make good his words he had, like Lord Ballina, passed a whole night on the island, but not a sound had arisen to reward his watch, or to strengthen his suspicions that the island was occasionally tenanted by something more material in form than the dreaded Banshee. But, meanwhile, by substituting more wholesome mental food, Captain Carmichael had greatly weakened Shelah's love for fairy lore, and those marvellous, but now forbidden, tales of Mick's.

When they arrived at his cabin, he was waiting outside the door to welcome them. In a state of considerable excitement, Shelah sprang

from the car. The sorrow caused by her mother's absence was swept from her memory in the pleasure of the moment, and, as she ran into the cabin, she called out, gleefully,

‘Bring in the basket, Mick. But I hope the potatoes are ready, for that’s the best part of the feast.’

‘Ther biling beautiful, Queen, and ther the mealiest and the foinest in the three counties,’ replied Mick, preparing to unpack the substantial luncheon ordered by Lady Ballina.

In the meanwhile, Hugh looked about him in thorough enjoyment of experiences so novel. And, notwithstanding that the bog lay stretched out in all its nakedness in every direction, the treeless expanse assumed such rich and varied hues of brown and yellow beneath the quivering light and shadow caused by the white clouds sailing in the blue sky above, that he no longer viewed the landscape with that profound disgust it had, on first sight, inspired him. The sun has a potent power, and can transform into beauty the homeliest surroundings.

Broad was the smile with which Mick greeted his guests, as he considered them, for had he

not provided the buttermilk and potatoes that were to help out the luncheon ?

It was altogether a very gay feast, but, being only the commencement of the day's expedition, they were soon again *en route*, the fisherman, at his own request, accompanying them. He had reasons of his own for desiring to make a pilgrimage to the far-famed wishing-well, for surely prayers offered up at a shrine so holy must help to avert the terrible misfortune foreboded to the family by the Banshee's dirge-like wailings, so recently heard.

As they left the road running through the bog, the scenery by no means improved. Two or three flat-shored, cheerless lakes, wholly destitute of interest, were skirted, and, on the borders of these uninteresting sheets of water, occasional groups of miserable hovels were huddled together, presenting an equally unpicturesque and wretched aspect. At the doors of these dwellings, from whence the smoke of the peat-fire escaped in many cases for want of other outlet, stood the ragged, starved inmates, momentarily roused from their apathetic state of misery and hunger at sight of the passing car, in pursuit of

which skeleton mongrels—and every cabin seemed to possess one or more of these ghastly curs—rushed furiously, barking savagely as Mick struck at them with his whip.

Even the sun seemed to hide itself in sadness and shame at being witness of the desolation of the land. Thick, black clouds were beginning to obscure its glory, and the day was rapidly and disagreeably changing. The chillier air, combined with the dreary scenes they were passing through, caused Captain Carmichael to give a slight shiver, quickly noticed by his little companion, who observed softly, fearing her native county was making a bad impression upon him,

‘It will be quite different and much prettier when we get to the wishing-well. We are quite close to it now.’

Her words were soon verified, for a turn in the road brought them in sight of the churchyard where the ruins of an ancient chapel, combined with the old Irish crosses, were of sufficient importance to give character and interest to the landscape.

The well itself was overshadowed by an

oak of venerable age, dwarfed in size by the passing years, but still retaining a trunk of immense girth, and branches twisted and gnarled into every variety of grotesque shape. Upon these branches hung pieces of cloth, tin, and rags of all sorts and descriptions, the votive offerings of devout believers in the miraculous power of the well.

Shelah had brought a piece of pink ribbon with her to fasten on the tree. Having gravely and silently accomplished this task, she knelt down close to the edge of the well, and by the movement of her lips Captain Carmichael guessed she was saying a prayer. For worlds he would not have shaken her belief in the spiritual power of the well. She looked so exquisitely pretty, so full of faith in the answer she hoped to receive, that those words emanating from divine lips, 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven,' rose involuntarily to his mind.

Her silent prayer concluded, Shelah rose from her kneeling attitude, and, unable to fill for herself the copper cup left for the drinking

of the sacred water, she begged Captain Carmichael to do it for her.

Very slowly, with a look of deep seriousness, the child imbibed the crystal drops, and then handed it back for him to do the same. He had been so intently watching her, and wondering what her wish had been, that he forgot to form one himself as he took a full draught from the holy spring.

Ah! poor Shelah! Both her prayer and wish had been the same: that she might find her mother's cold quite gone on their return, and that thus she might be allowed to lay her head on that loving mother's bosom again and kiss those sweet lips.

Hapless child! never more was she to be sheltered in a mother's fond embrace, never more was she to feel the warm pressure of a mother's lips on her own. The fiat had gone forth. Already the destroying angel was accomplishing with cruel swiftmess that pitiless work which was to darken for ever Shelah's hitherto bright childhood, and bring her face to face with premature suffering and sorrow. Well for her that the foresight of a mother's love had raised

her up a friend, who through weal and woe was destined never to fail her.

As Hugh carelessly tossed off his cup of water, Shelah observed, reproachfully,

‘I don’t think you made any wish, Mr. Hugh.’

‘That is easily rectified,’ he answered, as he smilingly gathered a little water in the hollow of his hand and applied it to his lips, saying, ‘My wish is that we shall ever remain friends, Queen Shelah.’

‘Ah! you should not have spoken out loud,’ she exclaimed. ‘They say it prevents the wish coming to pass.’

“‘They say’” has no power over me, little one. Whatever happens in the future, my pretty Psyche,—for you will always be associated in my mind with the butterflies,—I shall ever remain your friend, of this you may be certain.’

He stooped as he spoke and kissed her winning little face turned gravely towards him.

‘But it is getting late, my small friend, and, as I think we have derived all the benefit we are likely to obtain from our pilgrimage to this sacred spot, we had better summon Mick from his devotions and hasten back to your mother.’

Calling to the fisherman who was kneeling at the foot of one of the crosses, energetically invoking the aid of every saint in the calendar against the spells of that evil agency in which he had so profound a belief, Captain Carmichael desired him to summon the driver of the car, and soon the little party were hastening homewards with all speed, Mick having prophesied a serious change, for the worse, in the weather. His forecast proved correct, for the afternoon had set in dark and lowering, while an ominous wind was whistling through the old oak-tree and scattering its leaves round in every direction.

Wrapping up Shelah warmly, Hugh passed his arm round her, while she, nestling close up to him, laid her head confidently on his shoulder, where she soon fell asleep. Gazing down on her soft, childish face, so pure and peaceful in its expression, and reposing so trustfully in his arms, he murmured, with a pleased smile,

‘It is not difficult to vow to remain your friend and protector, sweet child, though I trust, in God, I may never be called upon to fulfil

that vow. I should ill supply your mother's place, little Shelah.'

Afraid of disturbing the pretty sleeper, he and the fisherman carried on conversation in a low voice across the well of the car; while Hugh smoked his cigar, and Mick that inevitable short pipe, which was never long out of his mouth. Gradually Captain Carmichael, unable to share in Mick's sanguine aspirations for the repeal of the union, and the ultimate triumph of O'Connel over the English Parliament and the oppressors of the Irish nation, became inattentive to his garrulity, and fell into a train of personal thought, while Mike, with an Irishman's tact, having discovered his conversation was not appreciated, did the same, and from the serious expression of his usually comical and cheerful physiognomy it was evident his were disturbing ruminations. He was to be dropped at his own domicile, and, as the car suddenly stopped for this purpose, Shelah woke up to bid him a drowsy farewell, falling asleep again immediately.

For a moment the fisherman watched the retreating vehicle with a look of anxious uncer-

tainty; then, moved by some sudden impulse, he ran after it and jumped on the seat he had just vacated, observing hastily,

‘Maybe, captain, her ladyship has some orders for me. I had best jist run up and inquire.’

Mick afterwards told Bridget, in confidence, that there seemed to be an inward voice warning him there was ‘throuble at the house, and he would be wanted. For sure hadn’t her ladyship’s mastiff been howlin’ fit to distract a body, for nights round the place? And everyone knew what that meant.’ That unaccountable foreshadowings of great catastrophes do occasionally occur is as certain as it is impossible to account for such strange facts.

Deeply disturbed by the gloomy presentiments which had taken such forcible possession of his intensely superstitious mind, Mick remained wholly silent until they reached the park gate, when the woman who opened it stopped the car and whispered to him in a furtive and agitated manner. As she spoke, he flung his arms up in the air with so wild a cry that it startled Shelah out of sleep, while Hugh

imperatively demanded what had occurred. Without replying, Mick leaped from the car, and, with one bound clearing the iron fence hard by, began to run as for bare life towards the house.

‘What has happened?’ asked Shelah, with the bewildered air of one suddenly aroused from slumber, and looking round with wide-open and frightened eyes.

‘I think Mick has started a poacher, that is all, Shelah. Don’t look so terrified, dear child.’

But, though he spoke these words in reassuring tones, a vague terror seized him, and in a whisper he desired the driver to hasten his speed. As they came in sight of the house, where lights were passing rapidly to and fro, he perceived a carriage standing before the door; the horses attached to it were panting and covered with foam, giving evidence of hard driving and urgent speed. On seeing this carriage, which was unknown to Captain Carmichael, Shelah’s face turned white, while in heart-rending tones she exclaimed,

‘Mamma, mamma must be ill, that is Dr. Baily’s carriage.’ She made an effort, as she

spoke, to spring off the car, but Hugh held her firmly, and strove to soothe her with words of hope and encouragement, though his heart sank within him, for at the open door stood Bridget, her tear-stained face revealing too clearly the dreadful news she was endeavouring to conceal. 'Let me go, let me go,' shrieked Shelah, as Hugh lifted her off the car; then, bursting away from his gently retaining grasp, she rushed up to her nurse, crying out, 'I must, I will see mamma. Dear, good Bridget, take me to her at once. I will, I will see her.'

'By-and-by, me honey jewel. But the great doctor from Sligo is with her now,' evasively replied Bridget, as she stood in the doorway effectually barring its entrance to her young mistress. She wished to gain time to form her reply so as not to over-alarm her precious charge.

With preternatural calm for so young a child, Shelah looked steadfastly up into her nurse's face, saying in a low voice, but with a terrible ring of agony in it,

'Bridget, has she—has she got the fever?'

'The doctor fears so, darling,' replied the

nurse, awed into truth by the look of terrible earnestness and anguish expressed in the child's beautiful eyes.

As she gave this fatal answer, a change came over Shelah's face. With a look of infinite despair she turned towards Captain Carmichael, and, stretching her little hands towards him, wailed out, in a voice so piteous that it thrilled through him,

‘Then I know she won't see me, for my sake, for papa's. Oh, mamma, my own mamma, and I called you unkind this morning; oh, Mr. Hugh, what shall I do?—what shall I do?’

She made a few steps forward, tottered, and would have fallen, had he not caught her in his arms, where for a short space she lay stupefied by the excess of her sorrow. Strong man as he was, his tears dropped on her unconscious face, as he held her to his heart; that heart, he had deemed to be hardened and seared by its own bitter disappointments, was overcome with sorrow and sympathy at beholding the affliction of this childish spirit, with which his own had been so strangely brought in contact.

CHAPTER VIII.

WITH greater swiftmess than even her own fears, or those about her could have anticipated, had Lady Ballina been struck down.

The sore throat, from which she had been suffering all the previous day and through the night, had rapidly developed into that most dreadful malady diphtheria, and when the doctor arrived her case was all but hopeless. In a hurried and scared manner did Bridget communicate this terrible intelligence to Captain Carmichael, as he bore Shelah up to her room.

‘She wrote you a letter after you left, sir. Here it is,’ whispered Bridget, in a choked whisper, handing it to him.

Laying the child on her little bed, he silently took the letter, for Shelah had opened her eyes and was staring wildly at him. Placing it out

of sight, he passed his hand soothingly over her head, saying, with gentle persuasion,

‘Shelah, you must try to keep quiet, for papa’s sake. I am now going to send a messenger for him, and also desire him to bring a doctor from Dublin.’

‘You don’t think she will die then? Oh, Mr. Hugh, say you don’t think she will die,’ exclaimed the child, throwing her arms round his neck, and regarding him with agonising enquiry.

‘None can tell but God, Shelah. You must pray to Him.’

‘I did. I did at the well. I prayed I might kiss her when I came home, and He has not heard me—He has not heard me. Oh! why is this?’

Alas! how could he comfort this aching little heart with attempted explanations of mysteries so profound—in this case so impenetrable—so impossible to fathom; for how to human sight could the loss of such a mother prove anything but a lifelong calamity to one of so peculiar a character as Shelah?

But, while he was painfully struggling with

these thoughts, Shelah's little arms were still clinging round his neck, in mute appeal for some answer of comfort. Her confidence in this friend was unbounded; he had made so many things clear to her, surely he would elucidate this greatest of all mysteries.

Seeing she was determined to have an answer, after a moment's reflection, he said,

‘Shelah, even your mother, who loves you so tenderly, has seen fit occasionally to refuse your requests. Yet you know well that such refusals were only dictated by love. Try to think the same of your Father in heaven, who loves you ten-fold better than can any earthly parent. Pray, my sweet child, for submission to His will in all things. I must leave you now, and send Mick off at once to Dublin for your father. If the doctor allows me, I will go and see your mother. You would like to send her a message, would you not?’

As he spoke, he gently unloosed her arms from his neck, and, as he did so, she sobbed out,

‘Give her my love, and promise to come back and tell me how she is.’

‘I will promise to come back, Shelah, if you

promise to try to sleep so as to be rested when papa comes.'

She nodded her head in acquiescence, but no sooner had he left the room, than, starting up and looking fearfully around, she whispered to Bridget,

'Bridget, have you heard *her* again?'

'No, no, me darling. Don't throuble yer head about her, but just lie down and shut your eyes, me own choild, and Bridget will sing you to sleep, as she used to do when you were a blessed babby in her arms.'

'Thank you, Bridget,' replied Shelah, gratefully. 'You will never, never leave me, Bridget, will you?' she asked, pitifully, with some sad foreboding at work in her little heart.

'Never, darling,' exclaimed the nurse, in a firm voice, as she passed her hand over the child's large, dilated eyes—a habit she had acquired in order to promote sleep when Shelah was ill or wakeful.

And the mesmeric influence of that faithful if homely, hand, combined with the woman's low, soft crooning of an old Irish ballad, soon had the desired effect; for, overcome with grief and

fatigue, Shelah fell at last into a heavy slumber.

In the meanwhile, having dispatched Mick for Lord Ballina by the swiftest mode of conveyance that could be procured, Captain Carmichael had an interview with Dr. Baily, whose report too truly confirmed the fatal intelligence already communicated by Bridget. Lady Ballina was fast succumbing to her rapidly increasing sufferings, and to that terrible disorder diphtheria, a malady little understood in her day.

‘I have done all in my power,’ said Dr. Baily. ‘But I grieve to say I am without hope, in consequence of her ladyship’s system being so enfeebled by her indefatigable exertions on behalf of others. She has no strength to battle with the disease.’

The doctor spoke with professional calm.

‘Can I see her?’ briefly demanded Captain Carmichael. ‘Is there the slightest danger, if I do, of my carrying the infection to others?’

‘None whatsoever. Personally, you run the greatest risk by approaching Lady Ballina.’

A contemptuous smile passed over the young man’s face. Fear of danger to himself had no place in his thoughts. He was dwelling in

pained reflection upon Helen—so young, so beautiful, and brave, whose noble courage had brought her to such a pass that she might not even take a last farewell of her child. Helen, so full of love and sympathy for others, lying alone, in horrible torture, unsolaced by her husband's presence, uncheered by one loved voice to soften her passage through the dark valley—dark even to her, though she held the blessed assurance that, once it was crossed, her eyes would open on light everlasting—dark, because that solitary journey involved separation from the husband and child she adored.

To leave so noble a spirit, who had sacrificed her life for others, to utter loneliness at this supreme moment, Hugh felt to be impossible; and though he had read his cousin's letter, exhorting him not to approach her, but to devote himself to the task of soothing Shelah, his mind was at once made up, and turning to the doctor, he said, firmly,

‘I hold my own life very cheaply. I am devoid of all personal fear of infection. As you affirm I cannot convey it to others, I will at once go and see Lady Ballina. In the absence of Lord

Ballina, my presence may be a comfort to her.'

In another moment he was standing by Helen's bedside. Had he retained any lingering hope that the doctor might have exaggerated the evil, he was quickly undeceived. The change that had come over her lovely features was appalling, they were drawn and pinched with agony, while her glorious eyes, those eyes which were her husband's pride and admiration, were closed, but not in sleep, for she was painfully gasping and struggling for breath. Near her sat the local doctor, overwhelmed with remorse at having betrayed an obstinate ignorance of her malady—an ignorance which had led to such disastrous consequences. But even towards him her unselfish consideration had not failed; she knew him to be a good and kind man, who to the best of his abilities had aided in all the efforts she had made for the welfare of the poor, whose sufferings had so largely called forth her sympathy, and, even after Dr. Baily's arrival, she still insisted on her old friend remaining in attendance, and, as long as utterance was allowed her, strove to console the heart-broken man by assurances that none could

hold him accountable for her death—for death and life were in the hands of God alone.

As Hugh entered, she opened her eyes, but she did not at first recognise him; when she did, she started, and waved him feebly back with her hand. But, kneeling down, he took it in his, saying,

‘Dear Helen, for me there is no danger, and I have Dr. Baily’s assurance that I cannot carry infection to others, or I would not have disobeyed your orders, and I thought you would like to know that I have sent for Dermot; but I fear he cannot arrive until to-morrow night.’

‘Too late, too late!’ she wailed. ‘For I am going to leave him for ever in this world, Hugh. But tell him not to grieve over-much—to live for Shelah. Oh! Dermot, my beloved husband, it is hard not to see you again.’

‘Helen, Helen! Do not give up hope!’ exclaimed Hugh.

She did not seem to hear him, her thoughts were far away with the lover of her girlhood, the fond husband of her later years, for, after a pause, she murmured,

‘Dermot, how happy we have been together!

Don't forsake the poor people ; love them for my sake—for Christ's.'

She was evidently slightly wandering ; for, suddenly withdrawing her hand from Hugh's, she stretched out both her arms, as though in the act of embracing some one, murmuring, with inexpressible tenderness,

'Shelah, my darling, kiss mother ;' but as quickly she thrust her hands out with a backward movement, as though repelling the little one from her, exclaiming, 'No, no, I may not. Take her away—take her away.'

'Dearest Helen, there is no danger. Shelah is not here,' he said, soothingly. 'I have just left her, I trust, asleep. But she sent you her love and many kisses. Will you not send her a message in return ?'

A smile lit up the dying mother's face ; the mists clouding her fine intelligence were passing away.

'My darling—my darling !' she murmured. 'Kiss her for me. Tell her never to forget mother—to comfort her father—to——'

She fixed her eyes upon Hugh with terrible earnestness, her voice was getting feebler and

more indistinct, speech was becoming an agony to the dying woman. But, as overcome with sorrow he stooped over the bed, he was enabled to catch the whispered words of undying love and care for her child which faintly passed her lips.

‘Tell Dermot he must never part with Bridget’; then, with a superlative effort, she added, ‘and, Hugh, remember Shelah is your godchild. Remain ever her friend and protector.’

‘Always, so help me God. Through weal and woe her welfare will be my fondest and first consideration. Helen, you believe this?’

A faint response, hardly more than a breath, came from Lady Ballina’s lips; but a look of intense satisfaction stole over her face as her weary eyes, still fastened on Hugh, closed.

Drawing him away, the doctor said, in a low voice, ‘that it was best to leave her ladyship; perhaps she might sleep, and, if she did, there was a chance for her life, or, at least, of its being prolonged until Lord Ballina’s return.’

Captain Carmichael entertained no such hopeful assurance, and, with an anguish greater than he had ever before experienced, he laid his lips

on that beneficent hand lying inertly outside the bed, and whose good offices were now for ever ended. Then, with one long, lingering look at his cousin's white, still face, he left the room to return to Shelah. But in the passage the butler arrested his footsteps, imploring him to make an effort to pacify the crowd assembled at the hall-door, who were clamouring for information about their lady, and who would not be persuaded to disperse.

Nothing could have borne stronger testimony to the adoration Lady Ballina had inspired in the hearts of her tenantry than the passionate desire displayed by these ragged-coated men and bare-footed and bare-headed women and children to obtain news of her blessed ladyship's state, a desire kept within no reasonable bounds by this excitable and mourning multitude. Men and women were loudly vociferating and wringing their hands with a vehemency of grief that was no exaggeration of the feelings overpowering them. Many of the women knelt on the sodden grass, praying with the utmost fervour that God in His mercy would spare their lady, and there they continued to kneel,

though the rain was falling in sharp, intermittent scuds, while a fierce wind was blowing in wild blasts, tearing through the old trees of the park that were straining and groaning like spirits in anguish as they battled with the fierce enemy, striving to uproot and lay them low. And as one or two fell with a crashing sound, the tempest, as though it exulted in its work of destruction and rejoiced in the prevailing woe of the grief-stricken crowd, flew onwards and swept round the house, rattling at the windows, screeching at the doors, as if determined to force an entrance, and annihilate everything by the force of its devastating power. It was, indeed, a desperate night, very unlike the bright and beauteous morning which had ushered in this day of sorrow. So wild was the storm, that as, in fulfilment of the butler's request, Captain Carmichael opened the hall-door and stepped outside to pacify the crowd, he staggered back beneath the violence of the blast, and had to cling to the balustrade for support.

As he appeared, the people crowded up the steps, imploring for news of her ladyship. With

an effort, he made his voice heard above the roar of the elements, and urged them to return to their own homes, reassuring them that Lady Ballina was sleeping, and that quiet and sleep were the only hopes to which they could now cling for her restoration. If she was aware they were watching outside, exposed to such a storm, it would grieve her beyond measure, while their uncontrolled expression of sorrow, if accidentally overheard by her, might have the effect of hastening the catastrophe they dreaded.

His words acted like magic ; all turned silently away, addressing each other in whispers, and walking gently as though their foot-fall could possibly reach the room where Lady Ballina lay.

As the crowd dispersed slowly, Captain Carmichael, wholly absorbed by the moving sight, remained standing at the hall-door. The scene was grandly impressive and mournful to the last degree. Through the black clouds, driving with extraordinary velocity across the sky, a sad watery moon struggled, casting occasional, fitful gleams of pale, lurid light over the landscape, and making visible, every now

and then, the faithful-hearted peasants, as they mournfully defiled through the park.

Suddenly, as Captain Carmichael still remained motionless on the steps, watching the retreating mass of people, they all, with one accord, as though turned to stone, came to a stand, while his own heart beat, not with superstitious terror, but with astonishment and awe, as that dismal wail, he had heard once before, rose on the night air, with loud and hideous distinctness, and, caught up by the echoes, was repeated over and over again, filling, in a momentary lull of the storm, the whole air with its doleful sound. •

Rapidly was the effect of that ill-omened cry visible on the crowd. Everyone instantaneously fell on their knees, casting their hands up to heaven with agitated gestures of despair—one and all were bereft of every ray of hope. The Banshee's cry had been heard for the third time—their beloved lady's doom was sealed.

Captain Carmichael waited to see no more. His immediate concern was for Shelah. Had she heard that fatal cry? Alas! he had not long to wait for an answer; for, as he hastily mounted the stairs to her room, there, standing

on the landing, robed in its white night-dress, stood the little figure he had learnt to love so well. Her face was wholly destitute of colour, while in her dilated eyes there was depicted a look of agonised horror and despair, most painful to witness. At the sight of Hugh, she sprang with one bound into the arms he held out to receive her, and, clinging convulsively to him, she shrieked out,

‘The Banshee—the Banshee. Mamma is dead.’

But this was not so. All through that wild night Lady Ballina battled with the foe. Her mind almost continually wandered, but hers were calm and merciful hallucinations, for she imagined both her husband and child were by her side, and in this belief constantly addressed them in words of love, and sweet counsel, mingled with snatches of hymns of praise or prayers for their welfare.

Towards morning she passed quietly away, happily unconscious of the abounding sorrow that surrounded her—unconscious of the hapless child lying in Hugh’s arms, and sobbing her heart out on his sympathetic breast. Already was he called on to fulfil the duties of the trust

confided to him by Helen, and once more, as he pressed Shelah closer to his heart, he vowed that his own happiness should ever be a secondary consideration to hers, and that no sacrifice on his side would he ever think too great if it were to promote her welfare. A vow he never forgot in after years.

We will draw a veil over Lord Ballina's return to a home bereft of the wife who, to him, had made all its charm and joy.

The ungovernable grief of a man, with his character, partakes of temporary insanity. The poignancy of his sorrow was increased by remorse and despair, for he knew it was pleasure more than business which had delayed his departure from Dublin.

The gay scenes at the Castle, the meeting with some old friends, had proved a renovating tonic to his flagging spirits, as quickly raised as they were depressed; and, ever easily influenced, when his friends proposed his remaining for some races about to take place, he was unable to say no to so tempting a proposal. It was on the race-course that Mick delivered him that letter which contained such disastrous intelligence;

even then it all but overturned his reason. 'Too late, it might be too late,' were the words therein written, clear and distinct. But still the unfortunate husband hoped against hope, only to realise the fulness of sorrow when he reached his once happy home, and, glancing upwards, saw the blinds of the house were all drawn down.

Alone in *her* room he remained for hours, for days he refused to see anyone, even Shelah, who implored permission to go to him—at night he roamed about the park, none daring to approach him, though those who kept watch, in fear of his committing some desperate act, could see him wildly gesticulating, as he called upon her he had lost. Deprived of that moral support which had hitherto controlled his impetuosity and guided his actions, he gave himself up to the fullest selfishness of sorrow for what was indeed to prove to him an irreparable loss.

It was fortunate for Shelah that she had, at this sad time, such a friend as Hugh to turn to for comfort; for she fell ill, and it was only when Lord Ballina was apprized that she was fretting

to such an extent at his not coming to see her that they feared she might follow her mother to the grave, that he could be at last roused from the egotism of personal sorrow to visit his little daughter. Once he did so, all his fatherly feelings awoke afresh, and, with Hugh, he shared the watch by her side through many anxious days and nights.

But Shelah was destined to have a long life, and, beneath her father's renewed tenderness and Bridget's nursing, the frail little flower raised its head once more and bloomed afresh ; but she had become a hot-house plant, and the doctors declared it was absolutely necessary she should be removed to a warmer climate, and be kept away for a time from the scenes of her suffering and loss. Lord Ballina had long determined on this course. He had taken a hatred of the place that had robbed him of his wife, and which her presence and love had alone made endurable. And, with small appreciation of the duties and responsibilities he was forsaking, he made up his mind to shut up his now desolate home for years and to live abroad, and informed his agent, Mr. Fitz-Maurice, of this intention.

‘None can blame me,’ he observed, irritably, when expostulated with on this resolve. ‘Have I not sacrificed Helen’s life, and endangered my child’s, by residing in this miserable country?’

To Shelah, however, his intentions were not fully made known. Young as she was, her father had an instinct she would disapprove of his determination. She was left in the belief they were leaving the home of her childhood merely for the winter, and, still weak and depressed, she looked forward with satisfaction to the proposed change, especially as they were to go to Malta, where, presumably, Captain Carmichael’s regiment would be. When strong enough, she visited with him all her old friends, and every favourite haunt of her happy childhood. The Banshee’s Island was the only spot she could not be induced to re-visit, while any allusion to the legend attached to it threw her into a tremor of nervousness pitiable to witness. During this time she often walked in her sleep, and had to be closely watched, for her steps invariably turned towards her mother’s room, and, two or three times, Captain Carmichael had gently carried her back and laid her

in her own little bed, without her ever awaking.

His affection for the child had increased to such an extent that he dreaded the separation that must ultimately take place between them. He had, for her sake, spent nights on the Banshee's Island, trying to discover the origin of the mysterious cry haunting it ; but, as though satisfied by the catastrophe wrought through her agency, the Banshee's cry was heard no more ; and, unable in the present to offer any elucidation of the mystery, he deemed it advisable not to revert to the subject either to Shelah or anyone else.

It was in the dark and gloomy days of mid-December that Lord Ballina and Shelah, accompanied by Captain Carmichael, left Ballina. Fearful of the farewell ordeal he anticipated might be in preparation for him on his departure, Lord Ballina had given strict orders that the day decided on should be kept a secret. But the tenantry had soon discovered it, and thus he did not escape what he dreaded ; for, though refused admittance into the park, they all assembled in the village, waiting for the post-chaise to pass, and when it appeared its progress

was impeded by the excited and weeping peasantry, who, realising they were being deserted afresh, crowded round the carriage trying to catch a glimpse of Shelah, who, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, and pale and thin from recent illness, waved her little hands towards them, crying out,

‘Good-bye, good-bye, all of you. We shall come back in the spring, when I shall be quite strong. And Shelah will always love you as mamma did.’ Then suddenly she sprang up, and, leaning out of the carriage-window, exclaimed, ‘Mick, Mick, good-bye, good-bye again!’

She held her hand out to him as she spoke, and, seizing hold of it, he pressed it to his lips, saying, inarticulately,

‘God bless you, me Queen, and may the Holy Mary be your shield. Oh, me lard, me lard, bring her safely back to us!’

Sinking back amongst the crowd, he then, by way of a last farewell, frantically flung his hat into the air, and took to running, all hatless as he was, wildly after the carriage. But Lord Ballina imperatively urged the postillion on, and

in a few minutes the carriage turned a corner and sped out of sight, when poor Mick flung himself face downwards on the ground and wept aloud.

So ends the first act of Queen Shelah's life.

CHAPTER IX.

OVER five years have elapsed since the events recorded in our last chapters took place, and we re-open on very different scenes.

It is towards the close of the London season. In one of the largest and most imposing houses a brilliant ball is taking place. Rank and beauty shine pre-eminent. The assembled society is composed of all that is most exclusive, while every sign of wealth and luxury combined with refined taste is lavishly displayed throughout this stately mansion. The fine suite of entertaining rooms are once more thrown open for the admiration of all beholders, after having been, for years, entombed in brown holland, and relegated to darkness and grim silence.

This gala night has long been a subject of discussion, and looked forward to with anxious curiosity by everyone, as it is hoped it may lead

to the elucidation of a domestic story which has been long shrouded in mystery.

For this great ball invitations have been incessantly and even humbly craved, but she who gives it has proved inexorable to every petition tending to extend the list of her acquaintances. And even youth and beauty have had to shed tears of disappointment over civil but firm rejection.

Lady Lillburne will not have a crowded ball-room. She has no terror of the unpopularity that may be occasioned by refusal, for the world is at her feet. She has nothing more to gain either from its smiles or its favour, and, as yet, nothing to fear from its malice and envy. Her popularity rests on the firmest foundations—those of wealth and loveliness most unusual, combined with a charm of manner and powers of fascination unsurpassed. If that manner is, occasionally, but the silken disguise of thought and feelings with which it is wholly at variance, the world has not yet made this discovery.

The world! how Lady Lillburne has worshipped it! What sacrifices she has made of honour and truth in order to stand in her

present position. For the sake of a title—for riches—diamonds—costly dress, she has bartered away her life's happiness, perchance her immortal soul.

But, since her marriage, Mabel Lillburne has other and subtler reasons for loving the world and desiring to plunge into its vortex. Here she hopes to attain temporary distraction from broodings over a past she would fain completely obliterate from memory, a past that in the quiet and retirement of the country was ever haunting her. For life has not turned out for Mabel quite as she anticipated.

‘Oh, for the waters of Lethe—that I could forget happy days gone for ever,’ was the occasional cry of her soul, as, in despairing tears, she would fling herself on the ground in hatred and loathing of her self-elected fate. This despair of what could now never be altered was, however, but occasional, and often only arose from petulant rebellion against conjugal restraint.

On this festive evening none could have surmised that the bright smiles so enhancing Lady Lillburne's beauty were aught but the reflex of

perfect inward happiness and triumph at having attained the summit of her ambition.

At this present moment she was indeed unusually content with her lot, for she had achieved a victory she had long struggled in vain to gain. This was the first ball Lord Lillburne had allowed her to give.

Dressed with apparent simplicity, but in reality with the perfection of studied artistic taste, the clouds of her white tulle gown were looped up and garlanded with orchids of the rarest description, a second *parure* of the same costly flowers were ready to replace those she wore, when these showed the slightest symptoms of drooping. A single diamond star, of enormous size and value, was fastened in front of the thick auburn plait encircling her head like a coronet, and she moved through the brilliantly-lighted rooms, dispensing, like a young Queen, her smiles to all around, doing the honours of her house with gracious courtesy.

For this evening, at least, Lady Lillburne was triumphantly happy. She had cast thought and care far away, as though they had no place in her existence. Her naturally frivolous nature

was intoxicated by the incense of adulation and admiration which she received from everyone present. And as, with her partner's arm already encircling her graceful figure, she prepared to glide round the room to the musical strains of one of the elder Strauss' vales, she exultingly reflected that such a triumph as hers was to-night, though long delayed, was almost an adequate recompense for every sacrifice she had made in the past, or all she had endured since her marriage. She loved dancing, and flinging over her shoulder with an impetuous movement of almost girlish excitement one of the long curls which, as was the fashion of the day, fell nearly to her waist, she exclaimed, joyously.

‘I feel a girl again to-night, Mr. Mowbray. It is actually more than four years since I last had a valse, or heard those delicious sounds. Come, let us begin at once.’

Suddenly she started, and changed colour, as a hand was laid heavily on her bare arm, while a cold, hard voice observed in a whisper, but a whisper so clear and distinct that Mr. Mowbray could not fail to overhear it,

‘I was not aware married women valed. In any case, I do not desire that my wife should do so, either to-night or in the future.’

The colour rose in torrents to Lady Lillburne’s face, while a slight shudder passed over her frame, whether from fear or anger Mr. Mowbray, who had quickly withdrawn his arm from her waist, was unable to decide. He was, however, able to observe that, as far as outward acquiescence to her husband’s commands was concerned, there was not a moment’s hesitation on Lady Lillburne’s part, who, with admirable *sangfroid*, turning towards her partner, observed,

‘Lord Lillburne kindly reminds me that it is too early in the evening for a hostess to consider her own amusement. But I am still a novice in entertaining. I must beg you to excuse me, Mr. Mowbray. So good a dancer as you are will have no difficulty in finding another partner to supply my place.’

‘To supply your place would be impossible,’ replied Mr. Mowbray, bowing gravely. As he moved away, he murmured, with a smile, ‘By George, she is cleverer than I gave her credit for

That was an admirable piece of acting, Mabel Lillburne, I congratulate you.'

An hour later the mystery of the Lillburne marriage, of Lady Lillburne's close retirement from society for more than four years was solved to the complete satisfaction of all the assembled guests.

It was quite clear that Lord Lillburne was a jealous tyrant, and that the envied queen of society was, for some still unexplained reason, completely subservient to his overbearing will, while anyone who knew Lady Lillburne could prophesy what the *dénoûment* of this domestic drama would be.

'After all, she only reaps as she has sown. Why was she so heartless as to throw over that charming Captain Carmichael, merely because he had lost a fortune?' observed to Mr. Mowbray the pretty girl he had chosen as a partner to replace his hostess.

'Lady Lillburne undoubtedly displayed a mercenary spirit most unusual amongst young ladies of the present day, Miss Montague. How differently you would act under similar circumstances,' replied he, sarcastically.

He was well aware that the girl who expressed such high-flown sentiments was more than ready to accept the first eligible *parti* that offered, though until that auspicious moment arrived she was content to flirt with him, or any other pleasant ineligible, when the opportunity was afforded her.

When Mr. Mowbray, with discreet tact, had obeyed Lady Lillburne's command to seek another partner, she turned quickly towards her husband, and, notwithstanding the anger and mortification which overwhelmed her at his interference in her evening's pleasure, not a trace of these feelings were visible on her fair face, as she said, with a smile,

‘I had no idea you objected to my valsing. Why not have told me this before?’

‘I did not think such an expression of my disapproval would have been necessary,’ he replied, coldly. ‘However, you are now acquainted with my wishes on this subject, so that you can make no mistake in future.’

‘But I don't care about giving balls, or going to them, if I may not dance,’ she replied, with the petulance of a child.

Poor Mabel ! there was much of the child left in her still.

‘That is unfortunate. But there is no occasion for you to give another ball, nor are you forced to take a part in such frivolous amusements. You have had the satisfaction to-night of displaying your jewels, for which you craved. Let that suffice you.’

He moved away looking like a thunder-cloud, whilst she remained standing alone. Tears of mortification and anger were rising in her eyes. But, though hers was not a strong character, Lady Lillburne felt obliged to exercise some self-command, for she knew the gaze of many was fixed upon her ; therefore, with calm dignity, as though nothing had occurred to disturb her equanimity, she attempted to make her way through the maze of dancers, in order to join a group of elderly chaperons she had hitherto neglected, and who now revenged themselves by actively employing their unoccupied leisure in cackling over the little scene between husband and wife they had just witnessed.

As with difficulty Lady Lillburne crossed the ball-room, she came in contact with Mr. Mow-

bray and his partner, and distinctly overheard the remarks of the latter, who was a very pretty girl to whom she had taken a fancy, and had good-naturedly invited to her ball, without the slightest call for so doing. It was the only exception she had made to her hard and fast rule of exclusiveness.

‘So much for the gratitude of this world,’ was her bitter thought. ‘Oh, Hugh! if you only knew how you are avenged,’ she murmured, sadly, as for a moment she stood still to let the dancers pass.

‘Can I aid you, Lady Lillburne? Though mistress of these revels, you seem in some danger from these mad valsers.’

Lady Lillburne started violently, as the tones of a well-known voice, the voice of him who at that very moment occupied her thoughts, so unexpectedly fell upon her ear. Almost unconsciously she placed her hand on the arm extended for her support, exclaiming, as she gazed wildly in his face,

‘Hugh, you here! I—I thought you were miles away. How good of you to come without an invitation, but you knew you would be

welcome, and it seems oh! so natural yet so strange to see you.'

She was trembling with agitation, perhaps with shame and too late repentance. He was perfectly calm, though his expression was sad and grave, as he looked once more on the well-known face, and into the faithless blue eyes raised to his almost appealingly, and still glittering with unshed tears.

Captain Carmichael had also been an observer—a sorrowful one—of the passage of arms between Lord and Lady Lillburne, and, though his own love for the woman whose hand now rested on his arm was dead, the remembrance of it still lingered with him, and it had been too true and deep a feeling for him to entertain the remotest desire that she should suffer for her faithlessness to him.

He had heard enough of the gossip concerning Lord and Lady Lillburne's married life not to be aware that the fulfilment of her dreams of worldly aggrandisement had not been followed by all the happiness she had anticipated. And, as he now felt her hand trembling on his arm, she inspired him only with sentiments of the

deepest commiseration, while every lingering thought of bitterness he might have harboured against her passed away for ever. He knew that he was avenged by the very hand which had, for a short period, shattered so completely his own happiness.

As he gazed sorrowfully down upon her he had once so passionately loved, his present calm indifference in her presence seemed strange to him. Without the slightest embarrassment, in a kind and friendly voice, he said,

‘I should not have ventured to come without an invitation had I not met Lord Lillburne at the Traveller’s. He asked to be introduced to me, and pressed me so earnestly to be present at the first ball you gave that I could not but accept. And I am really quite dazzled by your “Aladdin’s Palace,” Lady Lillburne.’

‘Not Lady Lillburne! never to you. Oh, Hugh! call me Mabel still. Be merciful and forgiving, be my friend as I once asked you to be, though you would give no answer.’

‘What answer could I give? You were married. A woman’s best friend is her husband.

She ought to have no other.' His voice was slightly stern.

Lady Lillburne gave a scornful laugh. She had sat down on an embroidered satin sofa, overshadowed by a large, drooping palm, and with her hand she made an impatient movement for him to do the same. But he remained standing, looking silently and absently at the dancers. Suddenly she looked up saying, ironically,

'My husband never does anything gracious without a motive. I wonder why he asked you here to-night? He is looking at us now. I can feel his eyes upon me even when mine are shut.' She shuddered, as she thus spoke with concentrated bitterness. 'Hugh,' she continued, excitedly. 'He did not know of our having been engaged to each other before I married him. He found this out through some kind friend, and bitterly resents my having concealed the fact from him.'

'I hardly wonder at this. It would have been far better for your own happiness to have had no concealments from him. Why did you not tell him?'

'I was afraid,' she whispered. 'He doubted

my caring for him. And does any man reveal his past career to his wife? Oh, Hugh! I have so much I wish—I must say to you. But hush! here is Lillburne coming towards us.'

As she spoke, in her great agitation and ill-concealed emotion, she broke into shivers the exquisite fan she nervously grasped in her hand. Deeply moved at the sight of her undisguised distress and fear of her husband, Captain Carmichael said, hurriedly,

'Believe me, Mabel—Lady Lillburne,' he corrected himself quickly, 'whatever you may wish to say to me had better remain unsaid. Do not think that I bear any resentment towards you for the past, all that is long forgiven. But by your own act we are eternally separated, yet I am glad we have met once more, and that I see you so prosperous, and——' he hesitated. 'I trust happy, for most surely that is my wish for you.' She looked up at him with a smile of hope and gratitude. But if in her vain heart she anticipated the slightest renewal of friendship between them, she was rapidly undeceived, for he continued, gravely, 'And forgive me if I remind you that your happiness can never be

increased by discussing your husband's conduct or your relations to him with others.'

These last words had been prompted by Captain Carmichael's intimate knowledge of Lady Lillburne's character. He realised the dangers and temptations to which she was sure to be exposed in the future by her evident and unconcealed want of affection for the man she had married. As he spoke he stooped low over her chair, his whole face expressing the deep compassion he felt for her, and the interest with which she still inspired him.

To those who were observing this meeting with the keenest curiosity, Captain Carmichael's manner had all the appearance of the most ardent love-making, and so it was by the world construed. But the world is occasionally wrong in the kind judgments it forms of others. And in this instance it most certainly was.

CHAPTER X.

‘It is pleasant to greet old friends again, after a prolonged absence, Captain Carmichael. This meeting must be a mutual gratification to both you and Lady Lillburne.’

It was Lord Lillburne who spoke, in a still, cold voice, from which it was impossible to gather whether he addressed Hugh in sarcasm or with a genial sense of his own words.

Lord Lillburne would not have been unprepossessing in appearance had his figure been in better proportion, and the expression of his countenance more cheerful. But the former was heavy and thick-set, and there was ever a settled gloom on his swarthy face and stern handsome features, while from his dark, deep-set eyes, overshadowed by thick, shaggy eyebrows, there shot occasional gleams of suspicious, sarcastic light, piercing through the very soul

and marrow of those on whom his steel-like glances fell. Possessing everything that this world could confer, Lord Lillburne was, notwithstanding, one of the most miserable men who ever trod beneath fickle fortune's chequered sky. He had become doubly so since his marriage, to which he had looked forward with ardent enthusiasm, as an event that was to renew his broken dream in woman's truth and constancy.

As he now cast a dark, suspicious glance first at his wife, and then at Hugh Carmichael, the latter drew himself up and replied quietly,

‘The pleasure I have in meeting Lady Lillburne once more is owing to your invitation, Lord Lillburne. But I feel I have already trespassed too much on her time. And, as I must be in the train early to-morrow, I shall not incur the envy of her other guests any longer.’

‘You are not going away altogether?’ pleaded Lady Lillburne. ‘I have heard nothing yet of your future movements, of Lord Ballina, and your little god-daughter. You will come and see me, will you not?’

In her excitement, the unhappy Mabel could

not dissemble the joy possessing her whole being at once more being near him, who had not only been her most ardent lover, but also the truest friend she had ever known.

‘I shall certainly pay you a visit before I rejoin my regiment. But I have business of considerable importance to transact, and my leave is one of favour and very short.’

He bowed and left her.

Kind, courteous, and forgiving as had been his every word, a pang of irrepressible anguish overpowered Lady Lillburne, as in silence she watched Hugh’s tall, soldier-like figure disappear amongst the crowd of dancers. She realised that the very calm of his words and manner when meeting her after so long an absence, and the assurance he had given her of his entire forgiveness, were the truest proofs that all the love he had once entertained for her was dead—that love, the very recollection of which made her heart throb with unavailing regrets, and for which at this moment, if she could purchase it back, she would willingly—at least so she thought—surrender wealth, rank, position, everything for which it had been bartered away. But love

is unfortunately the one possession, however coveted, that even untold millions cannot purchase, and none knew this better than Lady Lillburne, as, forgetful of her husband's close presence, the husband whom she all but abhorred, of whom she was abjectly afraid—forgetful of the guests she was neglecting, she clasped her hands in silent misery, while she mentally exclaimed,

‘Hugh, Hugh, come back and deliver me from my load of misery.’

‘Don’t you think it would be advisable to exercise some self-control, and not permit others to witness an exhibition of feeling which is decidedly uncomplimentary to your husband,’ coldly observed Lord Lillburne, seating himself near his wife, and fixing his eyes jealously on her.

‘I—I don’t understand you,’ she replied, petulantly.

‘Don’t you?’ he said, ironically, placing a retaining hand on her arm, as she made an effort to rise and leave him. ‘Wait a moment; it is refreshing to society to see husband and wife conversing amicably together.’

She turned and looked at him with wild, pleading eyes, but they did not soften his present humour, for he continued, in the same tone of ironical banter,

‘We had better understand each other once for all, Mabel. When you sold yourself to me—’

She winced as though he had struck her, and recoiled from him; but though, to a looker-on, his hold on her arm might appear the loving pressure of an uxorious husband, it was in truth like a grip of iron—from it she lacked both physical and mental courage to escape, and sullenly resigned herself to his will as with a malicious smile he continued :

‘It is a pity that the repetition of your own words should have such power to wound you. But, notwithstanding, I fear I must remind you of their import. When you make a purchase, however valueless it may afterwards prove, it becomes your inalienable property by right of that purchase. You are my property, Mabel, sworn to fulfil my will in all things. I neither approve nor intend that you should receive gentlemen visitors. Do you understand?’ he asked, sternly, clenching her arm more firmly.

‘Yes,’ she replied, faintly; adding, with a little more spirit, ‘Does this command include him?’

‘Him?’ he repeated, low and furiously. ‘Is it, too much for you even to pronounce his name? No, you can receive him *once*. You might see him every day, as far as he is or I am concerned; for, whatever *your* feelings may be, it is not difficult to see he has ceased to care for the woman who betrayed him for another’s wealth. But others might misconstrue any intimacy between you and your former lover. And it is a husband’s duty to guard his wife’s reputation against such misconceptions.’

He suddenly loosed her arm, as he uttered these bitter words in tones of cold passion, and rose. Then, as by an after-thought, he held out his own, saying,

‘The world, even now, must not mistake our affectionate colloquy. I will lead you to the refreshment-room.’

Without reply, she mechanically placed her hand on his arm, and they moved on to the refreshment-room. Here after having offered her an ice, which she passively accepted, Lord Lill-

burne left her, observing he would order the supper-room to be opened, and inform the ambassador, who was to conduct her to supper, where she was to be found.

‘After all, Mr. Mowbray, your wonderful explanation of an apparently thrilling story proves to be a myth. Where have you ever seen such devotion displayed by a husband, after several years of matrimony, to his adored wife than that of our host? Lord and Lady Ballina are a model couple,’ observed a kindly matron to Mr. Mowbray, who was offering her refreshment.

‘They are a very wise couple, Mrs. Graham,’ he replied. ‘For when in public they turn the key on the proverbial family skeleton, instead of dragging this ghastly domestic appendage into society after them. If more would follow their example, it would greatly add to the comfort of social life. Pardon me for leaving you, but I have to arrange with Lady Lillburne about the cotillon. Do you mind being left for a few moments?’

‘Certainly not. I have arrived at years of discretion, and can take care of myself.’ Then, holding up a warning hand, she added, ‘Now,

don't encourage gossip about poor Lady Lillburne; that won't mend matters. It never does.'

'I promise to take your kindly advice,' he answered, gravely.

Mr. Mowbray had known Lady Lillburne before her marriage, and had proved his friendship for her by warning her against breaking off her engagement with Hugh Carmichael in order to marry a man whose unhappy temper and tragic antecedents were well known to Mr. Mowbray. He had never himself been an admirer of Lady Lillburne; but they had always been and were still friends, and he now approached her with feelings of unusual commiseration, for her face expressed the acutest mental suffering. It was with the utmost respect and gentleness that he addressed her, saying,

'We were to have led the cotillon. Are we still to be partners, Lady Lillburne? What are your wishes?'

'The cotillon,' she repeated, a little wildly. 'No, no; I am too tired. I must attend to my

guests. Will you arrange everything? The presents are all in that room.'

There was a look of such despair in her eyes that, hard man of the world as Mr. Mowbray certainly was, he could not but be moved at sight of her distress, and he answered, kindly,

'Do not trouble yourself in the least. I will see to it all.'

'Thank you; you were always kind.' Then, as though involuntarily, she exclaimed, 'Oh! if I had taken your advice, I should not be the miserable woman I am.'

'No, no, not quite that, Lady Lillburne. Old recollections stir within you to-night. An unexpected presence has disturbed you. This will pass away. You will learn to forget. We all do; some later, some sooner. You are young and lovely. The whole world is at your feet.'

'The world,' she repeated, dreamily. 'I feel to hate it to-night; and *he* will not let me forget. I was almost happy this evening, and grateful to him, and how has it all ended?' she added, passionately, but had time to say no more, for supper had been announced, and the

exalted personage who was to escort her approached, and, offering his arm, led her away, pouring meanwhile a torrent of compliments into her heedless ears on the brilliant success of her first ball.

‘Poor creature!’ thought Mr. Mowbray, as he returned to Mrs. Desmond, ‘she did indeed commit a woful error when, loving another, she placed her destiny in the hands of that gloomy misanthrope, Lillburne, who is daily getting more eccentric.’

It was broad daylight when, sick of passively watching the eccentric evolutions of the cotillon, and wearied out with listening to the monotonous drone of its accompanying music, Lady Lillburne at last found refuge in the retirement of her own apartments, where, tearing the jewels from her head and dress, she cast herself on a sofa, and, burying her face in its downy cushions, gave way to a passion of convulsive weeping.

Oh, impotence of unavailing remorse! Oh! bitterness of those tears we shed over sorrow of our own making!

Mabel Lillburne was naturally a joyous,

pleasure-loving spirit. When she accepted Captain Carmichael, she was as much in love as so shallow a nature as hers could be; but at that time his future prospects were as brilliant as she could desire. She had never contemplated making a poor marriage, and, when the tide of events turned against her lover, she recoiled with horror from the existence of self-denial and comparative poverty that a marriage with Hugh would entail, deeming that

‘Love in a hut, with water and a crust,
Is—Love forgive us!—cinders, ashes, and dust.’

She failed, at the same moment, to take into consideration that

‘Love in a palace is perhaps at last
More grievous torment than a hermit’s fast.’

She was to a certain extent now realising this uncomfortable fact. And her tears fell faster and faster as she recalled to memory her husband’s sardonic words, ‘that Hugh no longer cared for the woman who had betrayed him for another’s wealth’—words she felt were cruelly true. As she heard Lord Lillburne’s step approaching her room, she hastily dried her eyes and rapidly undressed. He should not have the gratification

of witnessing a sorrow and mortification partially occasioned by his harsh words and stern restrictions of her evening's amusement. For, though she had apparently been so submissive to his will, she furiously rebelled against it.

She was already snugly in bed, pretending to be asleep, when, still in his evening attire, he entered the room, and, approaching the bedside, stood over her, holding a lighted candle in his hand. Grimly he gazed down on his pretty wife as he passed the candle to and fro before her eyes; but she kept them unflinchingly closed—her simulation of sleep was perfect. The long auburn lashes resting on her soft, flushed cheeks never quivered. She was accustomed to Lord Lillburne's present eccentric manœuvre; he had frequent recourse to it when certain that she was not asleep, and he wished now to force her into a conversation she desired to avoid, having a presentiment it might prove eminently disagreeable.

Though Lady Lillburne had no real strength of character, she had a considerable fund of obstinacy, which is unfortunately frequently its substitute. And, being gifted with some humour,

Lord Lillburne's present movements changed the melancholy current of her thoughts. They so strongly resembled those of the midnight burglar that they rather amused her than otherwise, and then she had the supreme delight of knowing that her immobility and silence aggravated him intensely.

Once, on an occasion like the present, he had been impelled by anger at her obstinacy to give her a slight shake, when she started up with such an unearthly shriek as not only to alarm him, but to terrify all those who slept in their immediate neighbourhood ; and this stratagem had led to such uncomfortable queries the following morning, that she entertained no fears of his reverting to this mode of arousing her attention, while the consciousness she had of his being irritated beyond measure at her obstinate silence was very pleasing to Lady Lillburne.

That he was irritated he soon made apparent, for, placing the candle down, he noisily dragged a chair close to the bedside, and said, loudly,

‘ I know you are awake, Mabel. But, though you may choose to keep your eyes shut, you can't close your ears, and I wish you distinctly

to understand I am dissatisfied with your conduct to-night. You desire the world to consider me a tyrant. You posed this evening as the persecuted wife. Now, remember, unless you so behave in public as to meet my approval, we leave London at once, never to return. Do you hear?' he shouted, infuriated by receiving no response to this threat beyond a deep, long-drawn sigh, indicative of the profoundest slumber, notwithstanding Lady Lillburne's heart was beating so tumultuously that the white sheet covering her fair form was perceptibly stirred by the quick pulsations of her heart.

Lord Lillburne, satisfied she had heard his threat and that it would take effect, rose with violence, upsetting the chair, and left the room, banging the door violently after him, thereby to indicate his total disbelief in his wife's somnolency. No sooner had he disappeared, than, starting up, she exclaimed, passionately,

‘I wish I was dead!’

This, however, was but the expression of petulant feeling; nothing did pleasure-loving Mabel desire less than death. But to leave

London; to return to that dreary northern castle, where she had already nearly died of *ennui*; to be once more shut up alone with such a husband! At all costs, this must be avoided. She would learn to disguise her feelings—to bear patiently a certain curtailment of her liberty. She must practise the art of dissimulation, and endeavour to deceive him as well as she could.

Mabel Lillburne was, as we have said, obstinate, frivolous, and vain. Her lovely face was not the index of a pure and lofty soul; yet, had she married a man she loved, it is possible all might have been different. Unfortunately, Lord Lillburne, though he adored his wife, did not possess the qualities required for guiding such a disposition, and, moreover, he was embittered against her by an unfortunate discovery accidentally made, causing him ever after to treat her with jealousy and suspicion.

CHAPTER XI.

It was frequently remarked of Lord Lillburne that he was a born misanthrope. This, however, was an error on the part of those who so judged. He had been, if a thoughtful, rather a silent boy, happy and joyous-hearted in his youth, until, suddenly, a great sorrow darkened both his youthful joyousness and his whole after-life.

It was after going to Eton that he made the unhappy discovery that completely changed his character, and left its undying mark upon a naturally grave and deeply-sensitive nature. The taunts and jeers of another boy—with whom he had a standing quarrel, and who was jealous of the superior position he held in their form—enlightened him to the unhappy fact that the mother he adored and all but worshipped as an angel of purity was the divorced wife

of another, a mother who had deserted her offspring.

In the first smart of indignation and humiliation at being scoffingly made aware of what had hitherto been so religiously kept from his knowledge, the unfortunate boy furiously assailed and all but killed his spiteful antagonist. But, as he recovered, the threat of expulsion for this assault was not carried into effect. All felt great excuse was to be made for one who had received such bitter provocation.

After this event, however, the character of the boy wholly altered. He avoided his companions and gave himself up entirely to study. At home he became morose and taciturn, his joyousness had fled with the discovery he had made. He had often wondered why his parents led such a retired life, what was the cause of his mother's frequent tears, and often deep dejection of spirits—phases of emotion and feeling which appeared always to irritate his father intensely. He knew the cause now of what had hitherto been a mystery. In former days he would strive to console his mother by soft caresses and tender words; after the discovery

made to him, his manner towards her underwent a sad change. In his heart he did not love her less, but she had brought disgrace upon the family—upon him. He was proud, and resented this humiliating circumstance, and, though ever respectful in his conduct towards her, he became cold and reserved.

Bitterly she recognized this change, quickly divined the cause, and it broke a heart long filled with sorrow and repentance for a terrible sin. She had for some time been ailing, and finally succumbed to her mental and physical sufferings. One day when the proud son entered his mother's room he discovered her on her knees before her *prie-Dieu*, her head bowed down on an open book. He was about to retire when, softened by her attitude and with sudden reproach for his own hardness, he came nearer, and silently waited until her devotions were concluded. But struck by her long immobility, the rigidity of her still lovely figure, he became alarmed, and in a low voice murmured, as he laid his hand on her shoulder,

‘Mother, dear mother.’

Alas! too late for endearments now, too late

to make amends for past coldness and harsh judgment. His mother was dead ! In a moment he realised the appalling fact, and his cry of despair rang wildly through the house. When they lifted Lady Lillburne up, they found her lips were pressed on those words of forgiveness pronounced by divine lips to an erring woman.

The depth of the young man's grief, who at this time was nearly nineteen, his bitter self-upbraidings were made known to none. With his father, a man of violent and ungovernable temper, he had never got on well, and their constant disputes had tended to aggravate the misery of Lady Lillburne's life. When she was no more, father and son agreed they would be better apart, and, soon after his mother's funeral, the latter started for Germany, there to complete his education with a view to entering the diplomatic service.

When Lord Lillburne's death ultimately occurred, they had not met for years. The son, engaged and much interested in diplomacy, never cared to visit England except for a very short period ; but on hearing of this event he was naturally forced to return to his native country

and take possession of his vast inheritance and his father's accumulated wealth. It was with no pleasurable emotions, however, that he found himself again in England as a permanent resident. He disliked gaieties of every description, and it was with a stinging remembrance of past sorrow and a sense of humiliation that he entered London society. For his mother's memory was enshrined in his heart, notwithstanding the pain attached to her history, which was known to all, and, misanthropical, stern, and gloomy of habit as he had become since her death, such brooding recollections as he indulged in did not tend to make him less so. In London he was only known by reputation, but this was not an irremediable drawback to his being welcomed most warmly. For in his dark, rugged way he was decidedly handsome, and, moreover, enormously wealthy. Consequently he soon found himself the centre of most undesired attentions.

He smiled grimly at the respect and honours lavished upon him by the world in general, and chaperons in particular, for he had not only no intention but no desire for matrimony. Finally,

anxious mothers, desirous of brilliantly establishing their daughters, voted such a fortress as he proved to be too impregnable for maternal attack, and left him in peace, retaining the consolatory conviction that Lord Lillburne was a woman-hater. This, however, was not the case, but he had no faith in their constancy. If his mother had failed, who was to be trusted? He looked upon all women with cold disregard or profound suspicion, until he met Miss Melville at a country-house, where they were thrown constantly together, and, whether this was by accident or intention, the result was the same. He fell desperately in love with her. Her beauty, her humorous audacity of speech and manner, her vivacity at once attracted the attention of this silent, saturnine man. He was bewildered by her coquetries, dazzled and fettered, before he had recognised in the slightest degree the power she had gained over him.

When he became aware of it, unaccustomed to control his feelings, ignorant of her former engagement, which had not long been broken off, he at once proposed for her, though she was the opposite to him in character, mind, and tastes.

But an impulsive man of mature age, desperately in love for the first time, rarely stops to calculate on the possibilities of the future, or give heed to the whispered dictates of prudence.

The suddenness of this proposal, though she had worked her best to accelerate it, surprised and frightened Mabel Melville, and for a moment she hesitated. The remembrance of a past love still lingered with her. It had at one time been so sweet. It was such a short time since Hugh Carmichael's words of passionate pleading had fallen on her ears in tenderest accents.

Perhaps, (at least she averred this to others) had he not so proudly and instantaneously accepted her selfish dismissal, she might have recalled it,—words wholly false. As it was, her heart beat with fear lest the golden prize within her grasp should slip through her fingers; for, observing her hesitation, Lord Lillburne said, in a voice of quivering passion,

‘You hesitate. If you love another, or do not love me, for God’s sake do not accept my offer.’

‘I have not said that I love another,’ she replied, looking up at him with mingled coquetry and alarm.

‘Then you are mine,’ he replied, quickly grasping her in his arms and placing his lips to hers.

As he held her in his embrace she slightly shuddered, and the lips he touched were cold as ice ; for Mabel Melville knew her fate was sealed—sealed by an acted lie on her part.

But this eventful evening was succeeded by days of such sparkling life ; the chain by which she had bound herself was so gilded and enamelled by the costly gifts Lord Lillburne’s passionate adoration showered down upon her, that at first she did not recognise its weight.

Then her triumph in having conquered the supposed unconquerable one ; the delight of her worldly old mother, and the warm, if somewhat hypocritical congratulations of her youthful contemporaries, on the brilliant prospects awaiting her ; all combined to make Mabel Melville believe she was a fortunate woman. Quickly was this belief dispelled. Madly in love—jealous, even during the engagement—Lord Lillburne, once married, and with brooding memories of his mother’s history ever harboured in recollection, determined to share his wife’s society with none ;

and after a lengthened tour abroad took up his residence at the family seat in Northumberland. This was a stern, frowning old castle, where his unfortunate and erring mother had spent a few miserable years, and where she had died so tragically.

It seems strange that he should have brought his bride to a home where the black shadow of a sad past still lingered in his mind. But Lord Lillburne was an eccentric man in all his actions, and when Lady Melville proposed, with a view to her second daughter's settlement in life, and in hopes of another brilliant marriage taking place in their family, that one of dear Mabel's sisters should accompany her to Belfort Castle, Lord Lillburne curtly refused, without giving any reason for this uncourteous refusal.

Then for the first time Lady Lillburne's heart failed her. The prospect of passing a long, northern winter—of spending dreary months alone, with one whose jealous temper had already alarmed her, caused the young wife many uncomfortable apprehensions. She hated being in the country, and was devoid of all interest in those pursuits which make it so loved

and enjoyed by healthier and less frivolous minds.

But though Lady Lillburne was not a clever woman, and had received but a superficial education, she had some wit and considerable tact, useful gifts enabling her for some time to disguise the hopeless *ennui* by which she was consumed, and her disgust at the uncongenial existence she forced herself so smilingly to endure. And, notwithstanding she panted to indulge in all those excitements and pleasures she had looked forward to her marriage according her, not the slightest sign of disappointment was visible in her manner, as long as Lord Lillburne remained affectionate and good-tempered. If his jealousy annoyed and bored her, these sentiments were not made apparent. She desired to propitiate her husband, for he had promised to take her to London the ensuing spring, when she was to be presented in all the glory of her newly-acquired diamonds, and to parade the Park in the barouche built expressly for her by his loving commands, and for which the whole of England was being ransacked for suitable horses. To have a splendid

equipage of her own had been one of Mabel Melville's fondest dreams. And all these pleasures, though delayed for the time, she could look forward to enjoying before many months had elapsed.

But an unfortunate day arrived when Lord Lillburne, by what means she never knew, was made acquainted with her former attachment and engagement to Hugh Carmichael, a secret she had so carefully concealed from him that, with the obtuseness an absorbing passion engenders, he believed himself to be her first affection. When so cruelly undeceived, all the darkest side of his character came into play, and his jealousy, once aroused, never slumbered again, while the mortifying reflection that he had been married for his wealth and position, and not for love, drove him almost frantic. What security was there for a wife's fidelity under such circumstances?

Black suspicion, love, and jealousy on one side, and fear and increasing aversion on the other, are not sentiments conducive to matrimonial harmony or domestic happiness, and Lady Lillburne literally cowered beneath the

words of scathing contempt hurled at her by her husband, when he discovered she had not only concealed her former attachment from him, but left him in the belief she had never cared for anyone previously to her marriage. For days after he became acquainted with these facts he rarely addressed her. But, notwithstanding the sternness of his manner, his love remained unabated, and he was ever hoping to receive some sign of regret and repentance on her part for having so cruelly deceived him. Perhaps this might have been accorded had he been a little more forbearing. But Lady Lillburne was a moral coward, she had no love for her husband. His jealousy did not flatter her, and she was terrified by his violence. The more so as she was aware he watched all her actions, and seemed perfectly acquainted with all her movements, however carefully she might attempt to conceal them. Under this vigilant espionage, she became nervous and depressed and wholly cowed.

At last, one day, when he happened to be called away to a distance, unable to bear the weight of misery sapping away all the springs

of her youthful spirits, in an evil moment she sat down and wrote to Hugh Carmichael, asking him why he had ignored her former letters, and imploring him to write to her, saying that punishment had followed swiftly on her want of faith to him, and that she was in sore need of the advice of a friend. Would he be that friend? And a good deal more, in the same miserable strain, she poured out to her former lover. Not satisfied with this unwifely exposure of her domestic troubles, she then wrote to her sister and, after giving an account of the quarrel she had had with her husband, ended with these words :

‘Lila, let my fate be a warning to you, and do not barter away your happiness for even the most brilliant offer of marriage. To be tied to a tyrant you cannot love is worse than death. —Your affectionate and most unhappy sister.’

Just as Lady Lillburne had concluded writing these ill-advised letters, visitors were announced, and, careless at all times, she left the one to her sister open on her blotting-book, the other to Hugh she hastily directed without closing the envelope. Her husband, as she thought, had left

home for the day to shoot on his moors. Nobody else was likely to enter her boudoir. Her visitors, she was sure, would not remain long, indeed she would make it her business they should not.

Unfortunately, however, these ladies, both mother and daughter, were equally dull of apprehension, and, being so, were naturally unaware of their powerful faculty of boring others. On they sat, unmindful of Lady Lillburne's yawns and monosyllabic replies to their remarks. The subject they had finally introduced for discussion was the newly-invented mode of hatching chickens by means of the incubator, which they pronounced to be an interference in the ways of Providence. Wholly uninterested at all times in such subjects, Lady Lillburne was no longer even pretending to listen to their conversation, for she had heard her husband's voice in angry altercation with one of the servants, and, with a sickening feeling of fear, she remembered the letters she had so thoughtlessly left exposed to view. Her visitors went prosing on, but they might as well have addressed a deaf woman. Fin-

ally, offended at her inattention, they were huffily rising, when the door opened abruptly, and Lord Lillburne entered, but so terrified was the expression of Lady Lillburne's face as he appeared that her visitors remained rooted to the spot where they stood.

When Lord Lillburne was much agitated or seriously angry, he occasionally stammered, and that he was at this moment labouring under strong feelings of displeasure and repressed passion was evident, as, ignoring the presence of his wife's visitors, though generally punctiliously civil, he came up to her saying,

‘Are you—you aware the post leaves in ten minutes, and you have left letters still undirected on your table? I have them here. I am sure Mrs. Dallas will excuse you, these letters are so very important,’ he laughed, harshly and sardonically.

Mrs. Dallas, who had already heard rumours of Lord and Lady Lillburne not being on the best of terms, was not so stupid as not to deem it expedient to beat a retreat, and, bidding Lady Lillburne a hasty farewell, she glided towards the door.

Lady Lillburne, with a view of escaping her husband's marital wrath, was about to do the same when he called her sternly back. Though trembling in every limb, she dared not disobey, and, closing the door on Mrs. Dallas, slowly returned.

'These are in your handwriting,' he said, sternly, holding out the fatal missives and striking them violently with his disengaged hand. 'If you dared, you would say no. Your letter to Captain Carmichael I have not opened. That lying open on your table I could not fail to see. I have no doubt the other runs in the same strain. But, as I do not choose that the proof of your shame should be published abroad, I now desire you to burn both these letters.'

He handed them to her as he spoke, and with limp and shaking fingers she did as he commanded. Nor was she sorry to see the indiscreet emanations of her dissatisfied spirit destroyed. When she had penned these wailing missives, beyond a weak, purposeless craving for sympathy in the troubles she had brought upon herself, she had no very defined reasons for revealing them to others. She was

quite conscious of still prizing at their fullest value all the material advantages she had gained by a wealthy marriage, advantages she was wholly unaccustomed to, for her parents were wretchedly poor, and Mabel had always hated the humiliating shifts to which their poverty had often forced her to have recourse. At the present moment, her knowledge of the extent of marital authority being rather hazy, she was in terror lest her husband should send her back to the home of her girlhood, and to the poverty and petty economies to escape from which she had married him.

Having burnt the offending letters as desired, she approached Lord Lillburne, and said, in a faint voice of contrition,—for she did experience some slight feeling of self-reproach as she recalled to memory his many acts of past generosity and devotion,—

‘Oh! forgive me, Lillburne, forgive me.’

‘Forgive you?’ he repeated, scornfully. ‘Forgive a woman who is not ashamed to acknowledge to her young sister, to her former lover, that she has sold herself for gold? Faugh! you are more contemptible than those

poor creatures whose presence you would no doubt consider contamination.'

He thrust her fiercely back as he spoke, and as she sank into a chair, sobbing wildly, he stood over her, saying,

'Listen, I came home to-day deeming that I had possibly been too harsh with you for a past deceit. I remembered that, after all, you were but a woman, with all a woman's weaknesses,'—his tone was intensely bitter: it softened as he continued, 'Then I reflected that perhaps in the course of time the love I still had for you might provoke yours.'

'And so it will, Lillburne. Believe me, trust me——'

'Never, after this day's work,' he replied, sternly. 'As you have sown so shall you reap. But remember, if you ever give me cause to suspect you in the future, if you ever rouse my jealousy by word or deed, I shall as assuredly shoot him who is the cause of it as I would the dog that bites me. You are warned.'

He turned from her, though she was weeping with hysterical and choking sobs, and left the room.

CHAPTER XII.

FOR some time after the unhappy scene that had taken place between Lord and Lady Lillburne, and which considerably widened the breach already existing, her terror of him was so intensified that she became passively acquiescent to all his commands, sternly and coldly issued, and made not the slightest protest when the edict went forth that, instead of passing the season in London, they were to go to America for a year, though the prospect of such an exile from England was most distasteful to her. But when on their return from this tour she found the passive obedience she accorded him seemed to fail in gaining his confidence, that the question of their going to London was never even mooted, she fell into a state of complete moral and physical apathy.

It is averred that the poor jaded horse which plods in dreary strides round the household well often pines and dies after a short time spent in this monotonous work. Such might have been Mabel Lillburne's fate had she been endowed with a stronger character. As it was, she simply yawned away the tedium of her days. She was a woman without one noble aspiration or any high aims. She was not ungenerous, indeed was ready to give money to any charity brought to her notice. But to visit the poor and afflicted had never entered her thoughts, and when this was suggested by the clergyman of her village she smiled at the possibility of her doing such a thing. Most of her time was passed in ordering and inspecting her numerous toilettes, and in speculating on those social triumphs that were to be hers during the ensuing season, though she sometimes trembled lest Lord Lillburne should change his mind and keep her a prisoner in the country for an indefinite period.

And how she hated the country, and how weary she was of this gloomy old castle ! Indeed, had it not been for the tremors and starts occasioned by the violence and uncertainty of her husband's

temper, and the constant changes these outbursts entailed in their domestic establishment, the current of Lady Lillburne's existence would have wholly stagnated; but these fiery breezes tended to keep up a vigorous if unpleasant agitation in her daily life. At times she entertained fears that Lord Lillburne was not always quite sane. Certainly his actions occasionally did not appear to be in accordance with perfect sanity; yet they were but the eccentric evidence of a man's desperate, despairing love for a wife he knew did not care for him.

One day when she was half asleep on the sofa, looking very pretty, with her auburn hair scattered in confusion about her, and a French novel held limply in her hand, he came noiselessly up to her side, and, as she pretended not to see him, rudely snatched the book from her grasp, and flung it to the other end of the room, where, coming into contact with a valuable piece of china, it shivered into pieces. So rude an announcement of his presence caused Lady Lillburne to spring up into full wakefulness, and she exclaimed, fretfully,

‘Oh, Lillburne, do be more gentle. You will certainly cause me to have a heart complaint one of these days.’

‘To have a heart complaint one must possess that organ,’ he repeated, grimly; ‘and can’t you employ your time better than by the perusal of such trash?’

As she made no rejoinder to these remarks, he gazed down upon her with a love the bitterness of his spirit wholly disguised, and asked, harshly,

‘Have you forgotten what this day is the anniversary of?’

She looked up as though endeavouring to pierce his thoughts, and replied, deprecatingly,

‘I have not forgotten. It is our wedding-day. We have been married four years. Oh! Lillburne, be a little kinder to me.’

‘And so I intend to be, and in the way you will best appreciate. Yes, it is our wedding-day, Mabel. The day on which you sold yourself to me. It is only fair you should receive a fitting remembrance of the sacrifice you made on that day to me of your fair self.’

Lord Lillburne’s voice had been rising in in-

tensity of passion, and, as he ceased speaking, he flung into her lap an open jewel case from which escaped a ruby necklace and earrings of inestimable value.

For one moment Lady Lillburne's blue eyes glistened at the sight of the jewels. They were the only precious stones she did not possess, and she had once expressed a strong desire that he should give her this *parure*. But vain, frivolous, capricious as she was, even Mabel was not proof against the insulting manner and words accompanying this rich gift, and thinking to triumph over her husband, who had thus acted, she replaced the jewels in their case, and, holding them towards him, said, not without dignity,

‘A gift so offered can have no value. You can return these to the jeweller.’

But even as she spoke there was regret in Mabel's heart at this sacrifice made to wounded dignity, and Lord Lillburne knew it, for, bursting into a scornful laugh, he replied,

‘Do you think I believe you? Do you dare even pretend to refuse these gifts, testimonies of my wealth for which alone you married me?’

He placed the jewel-case on the table near her. 'A husband cannot command love, though he may obedience. Your superfine scruple respecting my gift will have disappeared, I do not doubt, by to-morrow evening, when I expect you to wear these rubies at the dinner we give the neighbours.'

And Lady Lillburne did wear them, the admiration they elicited largely compensating for any loss of self-respect she may have sustained in so doing.

Shortly after this, when she was beginning to lose all hope of going to London—for Easter was fast approaching, and Lord Lillburne had remained imperturbably silent on this subject—he suddenly announced his intention of immediately removing there.

He had had considerable difficulty in making up his mind to re-open his town house closed for so many years, for he dreaded passing a season in London, where necessarily his wife must enter into society, and where her movements might be less under his control. But a petulant remark on her part finally decided him. One day when he had irritated her more

than usual by cross-examination as to the mode in which she had passed an entire day out of doors and invisible, she had tauntingly observed,

‘I have been sitting in the park. The deer and sheep amongst which I have been striving to kill time, and which are the only society this gloomy place affords, cannot surely give you cause for jealousy and unceasing suspicions. If you wish to prove they have no foundation, let us go to London. If it pleases you to act the part of a detective, such an occupation will there afford you considerably more excitement.’

It was strange, but this biting speech effected what subtler arguments or tenderer requests would have failed to effect. His misery, Lord Lillburne thought, could scarcely be increased, and his jealousy might be set for ever at rest if Mabel behaved with wifely discretion in society. In every case he desired to test to what extent his jealousy of the wife he silently adored was justifiable. Perhaps she might give him no cause for jealousy, and then, if this proved the case, what possibilities of happiness were still open to him! So to London this ill-assorted pair migrated.

It was a curious chain of circumstances that had brought Hugh Carmichael to the great centre of civilization almost simultaneously with the Lillburnes' return there. The fortunate event that had wafted him to England was most unexpected. A lawyer's oversight, a flaw in his uncle's will but lately discovered, had constituted him heir of two-thirds of the property he might justly consider himself to have been defrauded of.

Hugh was not over exhilarated by his sudden accession to wealth. Devoted to the army, and with the prospect of war with Russia close at hand, he was determined to cling to his profession and not lose the chance of distinguishing himself that he so ardently desired. Five years had elapsed since Lady Ballina's death, during which time his regiment had been quartered first at Gibraltar, and subsequently at Malta, where it now was. Ever since they had quitted Ireland, Lord Ballina and Shelah had passed their winters and autumns at these places, in order to be near Hugh. In the summer months they roamed about Switzerland or northern Italy, where he always joined them when on

leave. Thus, constantly in each other's society, the affection already existing between the young officer and Shelah was ever on the increase. He often asked himself how it would fare with both when the inevitable day of separation arrived—a subject he never dared approach with her. For though, beneath sunny climes, she had regained her health, she was yet far from strong, never having completely recovered from the shock occasioned by her mother's death, and he was well aware that the slightest hint of their future separation would cause her untold sorrow.

Second only to her father did Shelah love her godfather. For her father, the child's affection seemed to have intensified since her mother's death. She appeared to have amalgamated in one all the love she had formerly bestowed on each separately. As though to account for this accession of devotion lavished upon her father, she observed one day, soon after their arrival at Malta, to Captain Carmichael, who was the recipient of all her confidences,

‘You see, Mr. Hugh, he must miss dear mamma so much more than either of us. You and I have each other. But when I try to

comfort him by saying, "She is happy in heaven now with the angels," he only looks at me so sadly, and answers, "I want her here, Shelah, with me. There are plenty of angels in heaven. They might have spared her to me!" Oh, why did she leave us?" exclaimed the girl, bursting into a passion of weeping; and as the young man gathered her up in his arms, trying to console her, she looked up through her tears, saying, 'What should I do without you? for papa seems always to like better being by himself. To think of mamma, I suppose. Oh, Mr. Hugh, will you promise always—always to love me, even when I am not quite good?'

'I shall always love you, darling Shelah, even,' he added, smiling, 'when you are very naughty. Of this ever being the case, however, I have no fear. You see,' he continued, confidently, 'I have nobody else in the whole world to love, therefore I must needs love you.'

The little face brightened with pleasure at these words, and then slightly clouded over, as she said,

'But you must not marry, Mr. Hugh. You

don't think you ever will, do you?' she asked, anxiously.

Captain Carmichael gave rather a bitter laugh as he replied,

'A burnt child dreads the fire, Shelah. I think I may safely say I shall never marry, though we none of us know what the future has in store for us.'

But, when Shelah plied him with further questioning on this delicate subject, he put her off, saying some day he should tell her all about it.

It was quite true that, unmindful of the pale, wistful little face always striving to attract his attention, Lord Ballina, during the first six months of his widowerhood, preferred being much alone, and made no effort to shake off the egotistical grief into which he was plunged. But after this time, though he had by no means forgotten his heroic, beautiful Helen, he became weary, not of his sorrow, but of sorrowing, while his restless, excitable nature began to crave for some exciting change; so, hiring a yacht, he made frequent cruises in the Mediter-

anean, often remaining away for lengthened periods.

Shelah rarely accompanied him on these trips, for she was still delicate. And in the deep though unexpressed sorrow she felt at her father so constantly leaving her, combined with the yearnings still assailing the child for the mother of whom she was bereft, and for the home of her happy childhood with all its sweet associations, Shelah's life would have been very lonely had it not been for Hugh's sheltering care, and constant attention to procure her amusement.

His fellow-officers smiled, but not in irony, when they passed their comrade as he sat in the gardens, or on the ramparts, overlooking the sparkling cobalt sea, with Shelah's curly head pressed close to his shoulder, over which he held a large, white umbrella to protect his loved little companion from the fierce rays of a Maltese sun, while he related to her long and thrilling stories of the past history of Malta—the valour of its knights, and their gallant defence of their island home against the Turks; and

when his historical talk was exhausted, he invented fairy tales for her lighter amusement. Then when she became wearied of both they would roam hand in hand in search of butterflies and beetles, in the discovery and examination of which she still took the keenest interest, always provided they again received their liberty.

It was after a chase of this description that one day, hot and tired, Shelah flung herself beneath the scant shade afforded by a group of aloes and cactus,—by no means refreshing to the eye, for they were white and dusty from the effects of long-continued drought,—and looking up at Hugh, asked thoughtfully,

‘What is an absentee, Mr. Hugh? Is it something wrong to be one? for I overheard General O’Brien say to you yesterday that papa was another Irishman added to the long list of absentees, who were impoverishing Ireland by spending their rents in foreign lands. And he shook his ugly head as he spoke; for he is very ugly,’ added Shelah, spitefully.

‘I did not think you were such a good listener, Shelah, but little pitchers have long ears sometimes. An absentee is the name given to

those who forsake their own country, and live in strange lands.'

'But we have not done this,' she replied, eagerly. 'Papa is going back to Ireland. Mamma would be grieved, oh, so grieved, if we did not, and then I have promised the poor people that we should. I had a letter from Mick this morning, such a funny one. He says that everybody is blue-moulded for want of a sight of me. And we are all going back soon to dear Ballina, are we not?' she added, looking anxiously into her companion's face.

Captain Carmichel hardly knew what reply to make to this anxious little questioner, for he was aware Lord Ballina had not the remotest intention at present of returning to Ireland, and, moreover, that he shrank from the thought of ever again residing in his bereaved home, where Helen's love and thrift had converted comparative poverty into comfort, almost luxury. Lord Ballina hated everything that gave him the trouble of thinking, and he had made the unfortunate discovery that he could live abroad much more economically, and with much greater ease to himself, than in a place that since his wife's

death he viewed in no other light than that of a dismal prison. And having given strict orders that his tenantry were to be dealt with mercifully, and that all Lady Ballina's charities were to be continued, he was at peace with his conscience, and considered himself at liberty to lead that life which best suited his taste. All this he had confided to Hugh, who now looked rather sorrowfully into the earnest dark eyes gazing so pathetically into his, and replied, diplomatically.

‘And, when you return to Ireland, what is to become of me, Shelah? I am a soldier, and cannot desert my colours, therefore you and I would have to bid each other a long good-bye.’

The gravesubjects of absenteeism and Ireland's wrongs were forgotten in the fresh possibilities presented to Shelah's consideration, and starting to her feet, she exclaimed, with tears in her eyes,

‘Oh, no, no. I could never do without you, nor can papa. You take the place of mamma. But there is no necessity for you being a soldier, and unless there are wars and battles you could not be a great general, with stars and ribands. And, if there was a war, you might be killed.

So,' she ended, triumphantly, 'you see how much wiser it will be for you to come back with us to Ireland.'

'The first part of your argument is very logical, Shelah. But surely you would not have me fear death? For that would be cowardly. It is glorious to die for one's Queen and country, my sweet child.'

The young soldier's face glowed with military enthusiasm. But Shelah only burst into tears, exclaiming,

'And what would become of me if you were killed?'

She cared nothing for such prospective glory as he alluded to, and it took much reasoning on his part to assure her that this direful possibility was not inevitable even if he were called upon to fight in defence of his country's honour. He was unaware himself, as he spoke, how rapidly the clouds threatening in the east were becoming darker and more alarming.

It was some time after this conversation that Hugh was summoned to England by his lawyer, while at the same moment war with Russia was declared to be a certainty. There could be no

hesitation on his part about remaining in the army. His affairs once settled in England, he must rejoin his regiment and await the issue of events. Previous to his leaving Malta, Lord Ballina and Shelah had started for Switzerland.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE settlement of his affairs in England took Captain Carmichael a longer time than he had at first anticipated. After a prolonged interview with his lawyers, he had to visit his newly-acquired estates and convince their present owner that he was in unlawful possession. But having made generous provision for this greatly surprised and much disappointed individual, and having visited the numerous charitable institutions which had absorbed a considerable portion of his uncle's wealth, and promised to continue to them his support, he made preparations for at once joining Lord Ballina and Shelah in Switzerland; for, though the season was now at its height, the atmosphere of London, both mentally and physically, weighed him down, and forgetting how, when under the

thrall of an all-absorbing passion, he had thought it the most delightful place in the world, Hugh wondered how anyone could care for its aimless routine of balls and parties, or find amusement in what now appeared to him, in his altered state of feeling, such vacuous pleasures. This virtuous reflection crossed his mind as he leaned over the park railings one sunny afternoon on his return from the Horse Guards, and meditated on the vanity of all human wishes and expectations. For, had the great change which had arisen in his fortunes taken place some years back, how different would his life have been from what it actually was. Did he regret this? No, a thousand times no, for then he would never have come across the pure star that so brightened his present existence. He would never have known Shelah!

As he answered this mental reflection with so decided a negative, he caught a glimpse of her who had given it birth, as she flashed past him, looking sullen and bored, though she reclined in the best-appointed barouche in the park, to which were attached the finest horses money could purchase, for Lord Lillburne was particu-

lar in every matter appertaining to his stables.

It was his will that *his* wife's carriage should be faultless, and that *his* horses should be unsurpassed in beauty both of form and action. But he was rather tyrannical respecting the amount of work they were to do, as indeed he was on most matters. After he had been a few weeks in London, Lady Lillburne had to go out at the exact hour appointed by marital authority, and to return at the precise moment decided by that authority. When she fretfully rebelled against this rigid rule, he coldly observed, 'If inconvenienced thereby she was at liberty to remain at home.' But, inasmuch as her daily drive was the only opportunity afforded to Lady Lillburne of complete liberty, she was careful not to infringe on this Draconian law of her lord, who was also decidedly her master. For, much as she might wail and fret over his commands, she was of too feeble a nature to break into open rebellion. Moreover, she dreaded a summary return to Northumberland.

An involuntary smile crossed Hugh's countenance as he witnessed his former love's triumphant progress towards the Marble Arch. The

magnificent horses stepped proudly, as though conscious of the universal admiration they elicited, while Lady Lillburne, as if it were a condescension on her part, indeed almost too great an exertion, bowed languidly every now and then to passing acquaintances. Most people turned to stare at her or her horses, perhaps at both, for they were equally worthy of attention.

Remembering how Mabel had always coveted the possession of such a perfectly-appointed equipage as she now possessed, Hugh could not help marvelling whether it afforded her all the satisfaction she had anticipated in its possession. Unaware she had seen him, he was moving reflectively away when he found himself suddenly pursued by a breathless footman, by whom he was informed that Lady Lillburne wished to speak with him. Retracing his steps, he perceived her carriage drawn up closely to the rails. He had no particular wish for any farther explanations with his former love, for they could be but painful to both. The dreams of a soldier's ambition had so completely replaced all softer emotions in Hugh's breast—his love for this beautiful woman was so completely ex-

tinguished—that, though they had not met since the night of her ball, he was wholly unembarrassed as, taking her hand in his, and unobservant of her flushed, excited face, he said calmly, for he was both a judge and admirer of horses,

‘I congratulate you on your turn-out, Lady Lillburne. Yours must be the finest horses in Europe. Everyone turns round to gaze at them, at you also,’ he added, courteously.

Stung by the calm coldness of his manner, she replied, bitterly,

‘Yes, of course I am the happiest, luckiest woman in the world. Everybody is aware of this fact.’ Her voice softened as she continued. ‘Yes, I have everything I coveted,—everything for which I deserted you. But you need not taunt me, Hugh, for I am punished, bitterly punished. A brilliant outward show may disguise from the world what from you——’ she stopped with a nervous catching of the breath, giving Hugh time to say, gravely,

‘Mabel—Lady Lillburne, I implore you not to allude to a forgotten past. Let us renew our acquaintance calmly, forgivingly, forgetting all that came before.’

‘Ah, it is easy for you to speak like this, for the past is swept from your memory. Why, even he taunted me with this fact. Why should you remind me of it, Hugh?’ she continued, recklessly, unmindful of the many cruel, gossiping eyes watching her. ‘I have heard of your good fortune. Oh! cruel fate, why did it not come in time to save me from my disastrous marriage—from misery untold?’

Her blue eyes, blue as the sky above, filled with tears as she spoke. The sight of those beautiful eyes, false as their soft glances had proved to him, moved Hugh strangely. But he was a man of strict and unblemished honour, and, even had he still loved this frail, worldly woman, he would, now she was the wife of another, have gone to the end of the world to escape and avoid her.

Then he was inexpressibly shocked at her open admission that she did not care for her husband; such a revelation so fully revealed the worldly spirit which had actuated her marriage, as well as the shallowness of the affection she professed for him. Therefore, concealing the pity he could not but feel for

one whose calculating worldliness had been rewarded with such evident failure, it was in a stern and almost contemptuous tone that he replied :

‘ You are forgetting that your regrets at the tardiness of my good fortune betray how slight was the hold I ever had over your affections, Lady Lillburne. But these tardy regrets may be lessened when I inform you that I am not the millionaire I am reported to be. In a few days I shall disappear again into my original obscurity, and return to my regiment.’

Lady Lillburne was, as Hugh stated, perfectly unconscious of the egotism embodied in the plaintive and impassioned wail she had made over her past unfaithfulness towards him. At the moment she was only thinking of herself, and craving for that sympathy from him which in the days of their long engagement had never been denied her. His stern coldness recalled her to a sense of their present relations, and after all, what right had she to expect sympathy from Hugh ? She had cast his love away as worthless, and must abide by the consequences. Yet it was with a little hopeless sigh, and with

an inconsistency true to her character, that she said, reproachfully,

‘You are cruel. But God knows you have no reason to believe me. Yet you used to be generous, Hugh, and surely you might still afford me a little sympathy. Ah! if you only knew how much I stand in need of it.’

‘Sympathy sometimes enervates, Mabel,’ he replied, in softer tones. ‘Be brave. Accept the position you have made for yourself. Study to gain your husband’s confidence. According to your own confession, he has much to forgive. Begin your life bravely afresh. Live out of yourself, and sooner or later, rest assured, you will gain your reward.’

As she listened to this kindly advice—looked into Hugh’s calm, noble face, though she felt his love for her would never be rekindled—a feeble flicker of better resolves woke in Lady Lillburne’s heart, impelling her to reply :

‘I will endeavour to follow your advice, because you give it. But this is not the last time we shall meet? You will come and see me at least once before you leave?’ she asked, imploringly.

‘If it is possible, I will. But, if you don’t see me again, remember, Mabel, that our poor, human resolutions are evanescent as the air we breathe. In our own strength we are powerless.’

‘I know—I know,’ she replied, petulantly. ‘But I do not pretend to be religious like you. I never was.’

His voice sank into almost tender earnestness, as he replied,

‘Mabel—Mabel. Strive to become so. It is woman’s truest protective armour in temptation, her only safe-guard. May it so prove to you.’

Captain Carmichael’s forbearance from all reproach, his not even hinting that her present disappointments in life were the result of her own actions, touched Lady Lillburne, and she felt more sobered, more disposed to make some good resolutions than she had been for many a long day. And, as for a moment he held her hand as he bade her farewell, she stooped forward saying, softly and sadly,

‘Thank you, Hugh. You are the same as ever, kind and true. That I, voluntarily, forfeited such a love as yours must be to me an everlasting regret.’

Suddenly she dropped his hand, and started violently. Captain Carmichael, though longing to end an interview which had become so painful, arrested his departure, in order to see what had occasioned Lady Lillburne's agitation and increase of colour. Her face was crimson. He was not long left in doubt, for Lord Lillburne, who had stolen up unobserved, was sitting on his horse, close to the other side of the carriage, glaring fiercely at his wife.

‘It is all but dinner-time. May I inquire what urgent cause has arisen for my horses to be kept still out, contrary to my desires, Lady Lillburne?’

He made this demand in a harsh voice, paying no more attention to Captain Carmichael than if he had been an importunate beggar whom he purposely ignored. But Hugh was not easily discomposed, and, guiltless of evil, he was both grieved and alarmed at the terrible fear of her husband too plainly depicted on Lady Lillburne's countenance, and, observing she was for the moment incapable of reply, he said, quickly and composedly,

‘I fear I am responsible for detaining Lady

Lillburne in the park, so your wrath must descend upon me, Lord Lillburne. Those are splendid animals of yours; but a little more exercise would do them a deal of good.'

'Ah! Captain Carmichael, you have returned!' said Lord Lillburne, as though he had but just observed Hugh's presenee. 'Though unasked, I thank you for your advice. Pray accept my good wishes on your accession to wealth. To be rich is to be honoured. Had your good fortune come a little sooner, how different would our three fates have been! As it is, let me offer you my sincerest congratulations on being still a bachelor, and a rich one. Such a position opens out to you every possibility of felicity.'

Nothing could exceed the biting irony of Lord Lillburne's tone and manner as he made this speech, while the dark scowl in his black, deep-set eyes was quite in harmony with his sarcastic words. Not that they had been prompted by any incipient jealousy of Hugh, but he had a suspicion that Lady Lillburne had been unfolding her domestic troubles to this former lover, and the thought that he, of all

men, should be made the recipient of such confidences drove him wild. The knowledge that the world at large was aware he had been married simply for his wealth and station was 'the thorn in the flesh' that allowed Lord Lillburne no peace.

Having delivered himself of his very amiable speech, Lord Lillburne looked towards the coachman, saying, authoritatively,

'We dine out. Drive her ladyship home immediately.'

By some talismanic sign, well understood by them, the coachman caused his horses to step quickly onwards, and so rapid and sudden was this movement that Captain Carmichael, who was still standing close to the carriage, narrowly escaped being thrown down. Without observing him, Lord Lillburne galloped furiously off in an opposite direction. He dared not trust himself to return home until by the influence of rapid, physical exercise he had brought into subjection the violence of his stormy and disturbed spirit.

One swift glance did Lady Lillburne cast towards Captain Carmichael as she was being

driven homewards at her husband's command, and in that glance he read sullen obedience, reckless despair. And, unaware of how deep was Lord Lillburne's cause of offence against his lovely wife, he reflected with deep melancholy on the improbability of her ever softening towards one whose violent temper was so little under control, and who could humiliate his wife in the presence of others as he had done.

Profound, however, as was Hugh's compassion for Lady Lillburne, it was impossible for him to regret that her faithlessness had left him a free man. During the last few years his character had deepened and strengthened, and, even when his love had been at fever-heat, the absence of the more serious element in her character had pained him and caused him considerable misgivings. At the best, her religion had never been more than superficial—a thin veneer, which contact with the world had almost wholly effaced. Brought up by worldly parents, Mabel had fully answered to the education they had given her, and had she become Hugh's wife they would have been as effectually sundered from each other by the dissimilarity of

their dispositions and views of life as they were by the matrimonial chain that now bound her to another. He realised all this more than he had in the past, for Helen Ballina's death, combined with her holy, beautiful life, had made an indelible impression upon Hugh, enforcing upon his mind that there was work also for him to fulfil. Nor had he ever forgotten her warning words: 'The night cometh when no man can work.'

And, as he now rapidly traversed the Park, he rejoiced in the sense of his unshackled freedom to a degree most unflattering to Lady Lillburne, could she have read his thoughts. Ambition, a noble ambition in his case, had superseded all other passions in the young soldier's heart. The whole air was teeming with reports of impending war. The Guards had already left for the East, and their well-known uniform was replaced by that of humbler, militia regiments. Hugh's regiment, now stationed at Malta, was sure to be called on to prove its valour in the coming struggle with Russia, and, as he placed the latchkey in the

door of his temporary lodging, he exulted in the thought that most likely he would find a letter from his commanding officer, containing the glorious news that their gallant regiment was to embark at once for the East in preparation for coming events.

In the place of such elating intelligence, he only found, lying on his table, a letter in a well-known and loved handwriting. This was from Shelah. His heart smote him as he took it up, for, until this moment, he had failed to remember the agony of grief the winning his anticipated laurels would cost her. But it all came home to him as he held her letter in his hand, for this young girl, hardly more than a child, was the one human being who loved him with pure unselfishness, who would exult in his military success, or mourn, with heart-breaking sorrow, over any evil that might befall him; for Hugh had no near ties of relationship. Perhaps this fact accounted for the great affection he bore Shelah. And, giving a deep sigh as he reflected on the sorrow he would be forcibly obliged to give this loved being, he

opened her letter, but without breaking the carefully-made seal bearing these words, '*Va on je voudrais être !*'

He smiled as he read this loving motto, and then gave a start of surprise on observing that Shelah's letter was dated from Baden, whereas, though he had not heard from either for a much longer time than usual, he believed Lord Balina and his daughter to be residing at Vévay, where the former had informed him he had taken a chalet for the summer.

'Baden—Baden ! what on earth has brought him there ?' he murmured.

Shelah's letter accorded the answer he sought.

'We came here three weeks ago,' she wrote, 'but I don't like this place nearly so much as Vévay. I miss the lovely lake, and the boating and swimming that were so enjoyable at the chalet. But even Vévay I did not care so much about after we left our pretty chalet and went to stay at the hotel, for papa made friends with a lady there whom I did not like at all, but he did, at least at first, but afterwards he got tired of her, I am sure, and we left Vêvay quite suddenly. But she has followed us here, and is in

the same hotel. Papa appears to like this place, and is, at times, much merrier than I have seen him for a long time, but I think very often his spirits are forced. And, at times, I am sure he is unhappy. Yet this is a very pretty place. In the evenings he takes me into the gardens, which are lovely, and a beautiful band plays, and the stars come out and shine through the trees, and lovely ladies walk about dressed so beautifully! And everybody seems to be so happy, and all look as though they had never had anything to make them sorrowful. When the band is over I go home with Bridget, and papa spends the evening in a place called the "Kursaal." He took me in there one day, and everyone was sitting round the table with little heaps of money before them, and papa put money down, a lot of Napoleons, and when the man raked them away with all the other money he looked so very vexed. I was sorry, but afterwards he got them all back again, and he said, laughing, "Now, Shelah, we will come away, or my luck may change." But, though he is there nearly all day long, he has never taken me again, and, though I am very lonely

sometimes, I never want to go there any more.'

Hugh read no further; his indignation knew no bounds, and, flinging the letter down, he exclaimed, passionately,

'Helen, Helen! Is this the way he honours your memory, by taking your child into that den of iniquity? Feeble, infirm of purpose as I know him to be, I never would have believed he would have erred so far.'

But there were other reflections alarming Hugh. Not only was it evident to him that Lord Ballina had once more embarked on a mad course of gambling, which meant utter ruin to himself and Shelah, but it was also clear, from her letter, that he had formed a most undesirable acquaintance with, most probably, a designing adventuress.

Always quick in forming a resolution, Hugh decided to start at once for Baden, and taking Shelah's letter once more, and having read it attentively to the end, he came to the conclusion that, though she endeavoured to disguise the fact, she was very unhappy, for her last words embodied a passionate appeal for his presence.

‘You must have settled all your business by this time, dear Mr. Hugh, and I don’t like Mrs. Lawrence Brown; for I think she is deceitful, and, though papa says she is very handsome, I am sure you will not think so. I asked papa the other day when we were going to Ireland, and he answered, “We can never go back unless I get richer, and I am getting poorer every day.” Oh! I have cried so much since then. Do, do come to us quickly. I have so many things I want to tell you. The only thing I have to comfort me is a beautiful white kitten, which always sleeps on my bed. I can’t write any more. But I know you will be here soon.

‘Your loving SHELAH.

‘P.S.—All the dots are kisses.’

That very night Captain Carmichael started for Baden. He had not forgotten his promise to go and see Lady Lillburne, but he considered, if he delayed one moment in answering Shelah’s call for help which she evidently so much needed, he would have failed in the promise he had made to Helen, who, in too true prescience of

her husband's character, had so solemnly committed her child to Hugh's protective care.

Hurried in his movements, however, as he was, the terrible look of trouble he had witnessed on Lady Lillburne's countenance when they had last parted haunted him mournfully, and he wrote her a few kind lines, urging her to battle courageously with her troubles, and these he in no way ignored, and not to give way to a current of reckless despair; that her welfare would always be a matter of the deepest interest to him, though it might be years before they met again. Nothing could have borne more forcible testimony to his complete forgiveness and forgetfulness of the past than did this parting letter to Lady Lillburne. Over it she shed bitter tears, partly of disappointment and sorrow, but also of wounded vanity. The hope to which she had been clinging, that her former lover still held her in tender recollection, that he would at least afford her sympathy and counsel, was annihilated for ever.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Lord Ballina quitted Switzerland for Baden, after a six weeks' residence on the shores of the lake of Geneva, he was guiltless of any intention of entering upon that desperate course of gambling in which he afterwards engaged. He well knew that this sin was hereditary in his family, carried in his father's case to the extent of an all-absorbing passion, which ended in his complete ruin, and the consequent impoverishment of his heir.

But though, in his earlier life, Lord Ballina had indulged in play, he honestly believed that this fatal weakness was, so far as he was concerned, dead and buried beyond possibility of resurrection. Out of sight and hearing of temptation, it never occurred to him that the devil of play still lurked within him, only requiring opportunity to disport itself anew with fresh

vigour, and that when presented to him in the alluring form in which it attired itself at Baden, he would at once fall a ready victim to its seductive power. When with his daughter he first settled down in a *châlet* midway between Vévay and Montreux, situated close to the lake, and commanding a glorious view of the mountains closing in its blue waters in the direction of sunny Italy, he was at first as buoyant and happy as a boy. He had his daughter entirely to himself. There would be no more tiresome lessons to mar sport. She could be his companion all day long.

Lord Ballina, with the careless insouciance of the future which characterised him, was wholly blind to the necessity of Shelah's education being steadily carried on, and, when Hugh hinted at the advisability of her having at least a daily governess, Bridget being decidedly incompetent to fulfil that office, he had scouted this suggestion with dismay, declaring 'that such an abomination would be intolerable to him, and that, so far as Shelah was concerned, the child was so quick and clever, she would catch up all learning by intuition.'

It was owing to these circumstances that Hugh himself undertook her education. At the commencement of this experiment, Lord Ballina looked on and smiled. He was grateful to the tutor who thus saved him the infliction of a governess. To have an unknown woman domesticated near him would have destroyed his peace of mind. Since his wife's death he avoided all ladies' society. For him there had been, could be, but one woman in the world. But all at once Lord Ballina began to chafe at Hugh's too great appropriation of Shelah, and it was with secret satisfaction he bade him farewell, and with but slightly disguised annoyance that he witnessed Shelah's torrent of tears as she flung herself into her godfather's arms, sobbing aloud,

‘Good-bye—good-bye! Come back to us soon. We can't do without you.’

‘Am I not enough for you, Shelah?’ said her father, reproachfully, as they steamed out of Malta harbour, while, with the tears still streaming down her cheeks, she kept waving her little, damp pocket-handkerchief to Captain Carmichael, who was standing on the pier, a tall

and conspicuous figure, for he was in full regimentals, and the sun danced and played on his glittering epaulets and his sword which he flashed according to promise to and fro in the air, as long as the retreating ship was visible.

‘Oh, papa,’ answered Shelah, turning to her father, when Hugh was no longer visible. ‘You know that I love you better than anything in the whole world—far—far better. But I love my god-father next best. And, papa,—’ she raised her eyes and looked at him sadly—‘mamma loved him.’

Lord Ballina felt rebuked, and, folding her in his arms, covered her wet little face with kisses. Yes, Hugh had been his Helen’s friend, they were of the same blood, and he had been with her in that supreme moment when, to have been in his place, Lord Ballina would have sacrificed years of after life and happiness.

But Shelah was a quick child, and from her father’s words having made the discovery that he was jealous of her affection for Hugh, she schooled herself not to evince too great a sorrow at his absence, learning, young as she was, to exercise that self-control and subjugation

tion of personal feeling which alas ! in the future she was often forced to practise.

But youth is youth, and Lord Ballina was of so buoyant a spirit, and so entirely devoted to his daughter's amusement, that, though she still kept Hugh in closest remembrance, Shelah's regrets at being parted from him became gradually less poignant. The weather was so perfect—everything looked so fresh and green after the glare and dust of Malta, for the young vines were still attired in their tenderest foliage, then the lake, recalling to memory that of her Irish home, shone and danced in such glorious sapphire tints beneath the child's window, and the mountains robed in the morning mist looked so mysterious, yet so lovely, that when on awakening she sprang from her bed, and rushed bare-foot to throw open the casement and inhale the crisp morning air, each returning day was a fresh source of exquisite joy to this young spirit, blessed with an intense appreciation of the beauties of nature. Then the sunsets, which turned the grand old mountains into every varying shade of crimson and rose, how she delighted to watch these gradual changes, only consenting

to retire to rest when the dark shades of evening had crept over the scene of beauty, concealing it from sight.

In the entire freedom of an out-door life, in the boating, bathing, and swimming which the lake afforded, and the picnics she and Lord Ballina made almost daily to different points of interest, Shelah found such intense delight that often she wished her present life could last for ever, of course to be ultimately made still more entrancing by Hugh's arrival.

'Acknowledge, Shelah,' said her father, one day, merrily, 'that existence is much jollier without tiresome lessons! Even our sage tutor is not so much missed, eh?'

Lord Ballina's eyes twinkled with mischief.

'But I do my lessons, papa,' she responded, with a gay laugh. 'Every morning I learn the tasks Mr. Hugh has set me, before you are out of bed. And what do you think? our landlady is teaching me German. But I wish you would let me have a German mistress. You promised Mr. Hugh you would.'

Lord Ballina gave a prolonged whistle, ac-

accompanied by a comical expression of penitence at neglected duties, as he replied,

‘So I did, my darling. But you already speak French and Italian like a native. What more do you want? You are the most efficient little interpreter in the world, and save your ignoramus of a father all the expenses of a cheating courier.’

‘But you see I want to learn German quite well, because I promised I would. And I want to please Mr. Hugh. Everybody should keep their promises, papa, should they not?’ She looked up shyly and demurely.

Lord Ballina was vexed, not at her pertinacity, but at this fresh proof of Hugh’s influence over her. But, disguising his chagrin, he said,

‘Yes, my child, a promise should be kept. You shall have a German teacher, though to my mind it is a hideous jargon of a language, and your instructress is sure to be ugly, ill-dressed, and wear spectacles—all German women do.’ He made a grimace, and, glad to dismiss a disagreeable subject, added, briskly, ‘And now run off and prepare for a swim in the lake, and let us there drown for the present all learning.’

Away flew Shelah, light of heart; she had accomplished her desire, and these swimming pastimes were one of her greatest enjoyments. When she returned, she was clad in the sweetest little costume possible, composed of blue serge, trimmed with scarlet, a scarlet sash round her waist, while a sailor's hat covered her fair hair. Bridget followed, holding a cloak, to be thrown over her young mistress when she came out of the water.

Lord Ballina was attired in his boating-suit of white flannel, and the three walked down to the lake, or rather Shelah and her father raced down the slopes of the rapidly descending vineyard belonging to their *châlet*. The door of which opened direct on the water, where a boat lay in readiness for them.

Though now past forty, Lord Ballina, with his still abundant curly golden hair, and his beard and moustache of the same vivid colour, his clear fresh complexion, and splendidly proportioned figure, might have passed for thirty. Grief, deeply even as he had felt his, leaves but slight outward trace on a man of his physique and temperament.

As he stood up in the boat, making arrangements for Shelah's comfort, he formed a fitting figure in the foreground of the unsurpassingly lovely landscape surrounding them, and she gazed at him with eyes brimming over with admiration and love. Beautiful at all times, in those white flannels she considered her father perfection. It had never struck Shelah to reflect on Hugh's outward appearance. It was his goodness and kindness to herself, and everyone with whom he came in contact, which had steeped the girl's whole soul in gratitude towards him. And then she felt she could so entirely depend upon her god-father. Lord Ballina's exterior was of that striking character that at once attracts and commands admiration. You might pass Hugh in a crowd without special notice, but, once known, his image remained indelibly stamped on memory, for in him the spiritual man predominated over the material, and this higher ascendancy was as visibly expressed on his countenance as it was exemplified in all the actions of his life.

‘Shelah, my darling, wake up, you are in one of your dreams. Jump in quickly, and we may

yet escape the admiring crowd assembling to watch our proceedings. Give me the cloak, Bridget, and wait for our return.'

Shelah started out of her reverie as Lord Ballina spoke, and then sprang nimbly into the boat, waving an adieu to her nurse. In another moment Lord Ballina, with a few vigorous strokes of his strong arms, had shot their little craft several yards from the shore. As her father observed, Shelah had been dreaming—dreaming of her mother, and of the first swimming-lesson she had received from her father on the Ballina lake, when Helen, looking like a guardian angel, had stood on the shore, exhorting the child to be courageous, though, as Shelah well knew, she was trembling with maternal anxiety at her darling's first venture in the art of swimming. But Lord Ballina was in such good spirits this afternoon that, when he again asked her of what she had been dreaming, Shelah would not damp his joyousness by a true answer, and said, smilingly,

'A hundred, thousand things, papa. But please stop, the water looks so lovely and blue just

here, I should like to take my plunge in this very spot. Look, you can see quite clearly down.'

'All right, my little maid,' he replied, laying to on his oars, and taking out a cigar.

In the meanwhile, Shelah had thrown off her cloak, and flung down her hat.

'Now, papa, the signal.' She was standing on one of the seats, her arms stretched out, her pretty hands pressed tightly one against the other.

'One—two—three, and away,' exclaimed Lord Ballina.

In she plunged at the last word, not disappearing beneath the blue, translucent waters, for she was plainly discernible in its clear depths as she dived down to come up again at a little distance.

During the next half-hour Shelah continued her aquatic performances, diving, floating, and swimming, sometimes with one arm, sometimes on her back, with an ease and daring courage marvellous in one so young. The only branch of education Lord Ballina had imparted to his daughter had certainly been brought to a

successful issue, for Shelah was the veriest water-nymph that had ever disported in her native element.

‘Now, Shelah, you had better come home, or you will be over-tired,’ called out her father, as, after an unusually lengthened dive, she re-appeared on the surface of the water, shaking the dripping hair from her face and eyes, and laughing merrily meanwhile. Obedient to the call, rosy, but slightly breathless from her late exertions, she swam back to the boat, and scrambled in with her father’s help, who, wrapping her up carefully, observed smiling, ‘I thought you had forsaken me altogether, and gone down to dwell with old Neptune. I don’t think I could have remained so long under water myself.’ Throwing away his cigar, he took up the oars, and began to row rapidly in shore. ‘Do you know, Shelah, you have had an addition to your audience to-day,’ he observed, after a momentary silence. ‘You did not see them, but two ladies came close by in a boat, and, by Jove, one was uncommonly handsome!’

Shelah dropped the towel with which she was mopping her face and hair, and looked up at her

father in unbounded astonishment, repeating the word 'handsome' in a half stupefied manner. She had never heard her father call a lady 'handsome,' or speak of one, since her mother's death. How could he think any lady handsome after her beautiful mamma? She felt hurt and indignant, but Lord Ballina was evidently much excited on the subject, for he repeated,

'Yes, handsome, very handsome, my water-sprite. I have rarely seen such eyes. They were in the Vévay hotel boat, so I suppose they are staying at the hotel. Most likely we shall see them at the table-d'hôte to-morrow. It is our evening for dining there. They appear to me quite unlike the usual tourist lot, and a little society will be a pleasant novelty to both you and me.'

Shelah made no reply. There was a rising lump in her throat. Certainly she was only a child, but she had been so happy, so contented alone with her father, and had thought he was so also, and now he talked as if he wished for society; hitherto he had avoided it with aversion, as an unpleasant interruption of their quiet happy days.

This sudden change of feeling on his part

dismayed her. She could not make it out. Perhaps it was as well she could not, for the fact was, as the elasticity of his spirits returned, Lord Ballina craved for a little more excitement than his chalet afforded, and, though from reasons of economy he remained on there, he often regretted not being at the hotel, as, when Shelah was in bed, he found his evenings, after the first week or two, disastrously dull. He was no very studious reader, and his stock of light literature was almost exhausted.

At Malta, the club, dinners at the mess, officers dropping in at odd times afforded him easy and agreeable variety, and now that he had forgotten, Hugh being at a distance, how his jealousy had been aroused by Shelah's devotion to her godfather, he began rather to tire of the exclusive society of his little girl, and to find the life in which he had at first experienced considerable enjoyment monotonous and decidedly dull, though he hardly acknowledged this to himself.

It only took a few moments for the boat to reach land, and as soon as the keel touched the shore Shelah sprang silently out to be caught

in Bridget's arms and hurried through the little crowd who always assembled to watch with astonishment and admiration the young English girl's wonderful performances in the water, and to greet her return with warm applause. Sometimes she would delay a moment in order to make a kindly remark to one of the peasants, wholly regardless of Bridget's earnest entreaties that she would hurry home and dress. But to-day she made no resistance to the good woman's remonstrances and fears of her catching cold, but ran quickly towards the garden door, disappearing immediately from her disappointed admirers.

Bridget saw something was wrong, but wisely forebore to question her young mistress, and set to work at once to dry her hair and remove her wet clothing.

'Do you ever feel dull here, Bridget?' asked Shelah, after a lengthened silence, during which the nurse was rubbing and scrubbing violently.

'Well, I'm lonesome like occasionally, Miss Shelah, when you are away. I miss me blessed bogs, and me arguments with Mick, though he never will be convinced. Then these big,

tall mountains are melancholy to my mind. And I can't help thinking they might have been arranged better, for one can't get a sight over their heads. And I am always wanting to have a peep at their backs.'

Shelah smiled languidly, looking up at her nurse through the tangle of fair hair hanging over her face which Bridget was vainly trying to comb out.

'And then the food is so messy in these countries, Miss Shelah. The beautiful potatoes all smashed and fried and murdered like instead of coming to your plate in their lovely skins. But may be the'r such sloppy, shabby little things in this country, the'r ashamed to let us see them except dressed up so that you don't know whether it's a tater or a turnip you have in your mouth.'

'Bridget!'

So suddenly did Shelah call out her name, that the nurse let the brush fall, and bounded back saying, 'It's the start you gave me. What ails you, me darling?'

'Nothing, Bridget, I am sorry I startled you,' answered Shelah, more quietly.

She had been deep in reflection, and had not heard one word the nurse had been saying. She now looked at her steadily, saying,

‘Do you think papa is dull here?—wants more grown-up people to talk to?’

‘And if he does he can get plenty of society over at the hotel, Miss Shelah. I hear tell dances and all sorts of things go on there.’

‘Have you seen two ladies that have come there lately, Bridget? And are they beautiful?’ asked the child, earnestly, unheeding Bridget’s account of the hotel gaieties.

‘Oh! I’ve seen more than I want of them,’ replied Bridget, with an angry toss of her head. ‘If fine feathers make fine birds, both these two are fine enough, in all conscience. When you and his lordship were away at Berne,’ (pronounced by Bridget ‘Burn,’) ‘they came up here and asked if I thought his lordship would have any objection to their seeing his lovely “shalletti,” and I said I knew nothing about me lordship’s objections or subjections. But I had no orders to show it, and I wouldn’t, no, not to the Queen or the Pope of Rome himself, without his lordship’s written word. And the

lady, the biggest and the grandest of the two, all silks and satins, and smirks and smiles, turned round to an ugly bit of a brown girl she had with her, and whispered, "What an Irish savage! And what a disgusting brogue! Never mind, we can wait!" The whisper was a loud one, and my hearing is cute still. I ran down after them, and banged and bolted the door with as much row as I could make. Then I laughed outright, for I knew it would anger the beauties. "An Irish savage indeed! It's them that is the savages," thinks I. "Why, a hathen would have more manners than to push themselves unaxed into a gintleman's house." There, dearie, you are as nice as nice can be now, just all the world like a rose-bud after a shower of rain. The blessing of God be upon you.'

The woman placed her hands devoutly on the young girl's head, and then kissed her fondly.

'Thank you, dear old Bridget. I am sorry you ever feel lonely. But perhaps, as you are only lonely when I am away, it is the same with papa. I wish he would let me sit up later of an evening. It is then he must miss mamma so much. I wish I was grown up.'

Shelah sighed.

‘I am too young to amuse him as she did.’

‘You will grow up quick enough. Leave trouble alone till then. And don’t be bothering yourself, jewel. Your papa will do well enough. He will not be lonely, as you imagine, of nights any longer. For the last week he has taken to walking over to the hotel when you are a-bed.’

‘Ah!’ was all Shelah’s response to words spoken with the kind intention of reassuring her, but which fell like lead on her young heart, for her father had not told her he went to the hotel. Evidently he did feel his loneliness, but wished to conceal the fact from his little daughter.

Gathering up her books, she walked pensively towards the sitting-room to lie down and rest, and to study her self-appointed lessons, as was her wont after bathing, until Lord Ballina came in for tea. During Shelah’s restful hour he usually took what he called a racer on the lake. But on this day, instead of returning to the boat after Shelah had gone home, he drew it up on shore, and bent his steps towards the hotel, muttering, as he straightened himself, pulled up his collar, and pulled down his sleeves,

‘I shall just walk over and find out who they are. She is certainly one of the handsomest women I have seen for ages.’

Being a vigorous walker, he soon reached his destination, a distance of a couple of miles. To his query whether there were any fresh arrivals, the secretary replied, ‘that Madame and Made-moiselle Lawrence Brown could hardly be called new arrivals, for they were *habitués* of the hotel, who had been touring in the mountains, but they had returned to their apartments au premier the previous evening, and were now sitting in the garden.’ Having ordered a cup of coffee, Lord Ballina thither adjourned. As usual he was acting upon the impulse of the moment, but unfortunately his impulses were often followed by consequences involving both himself and others in disaster.

There were several small knots of tourists sitting about, all of them more or less uninteresting. But, though his unwonted appearance made a decided stir amongst them, not being a shy man this in no way disturbed his equanimity, and he gazed calmly around, in hopes of seeing the object of his curiosity. Finally he perceived her sitting

under a wide-spreading maple, apparently deep in a book. She was extremely well-dressed, and Lord Ballina was satisfied that he had not been mistaken as to her good looks. After a moment's hesitation he perceived there was an unoccupied table close to where Mrs. Lawrence Brown sat, and of this he immediately took possession, not observing that upon it lay a sketch-book. After a few moments, during which his coffee was handed to him, the reader put down her book, and, looking towards the hotel, called out, in a loud voice, 'Adela.'

Lord Ballina was unpleasantly startled. What a voice! He was fastidious in these matters, and thought he had never heard less melodious tones. No Adela appearing in response to the call, a slight look of impatience passed over the lady's face, and, rising quickly, she turned and approached the table where Lord Ballina sat. Evidently she had not before observed him. Now that she did, her eyes sparkled with pleasure, and her colour perceptibly rose. Under the influence of pleasurable surprise, she looked so handsome that Lord Ballina no longer dwelt upon the disagreeable im-

pression her voice had made upon him. Indeed, he considered he must have been mistaken, when in words of dulcet sweetness, she said,

‘Excuse me, Lord Ballina, but your arm is on my sketch-book. I am sorry to be obliged to disturb you.’

‘A thousand pardons, madam.’ He rose, and handed it to her. ‘May I ask how you know my name? I do not think we have met before, Mrs. Brown.’

‘I might retort how do you know mine?’ she replied, with a fine smile, displaying a row of very white, if too large, teeth. ‘You and your lovely daughter cannot fail to be known in a place like Vévay. I am a very humble personage, whose proceedings can create but small attention, I may say none.’

‘You must allow me to differ in that opinion,’ replied Lord Ballina, with a courteous bow.

This lady was charming, and, following her to the table where she had been sitting, he craved permission to look at her sketches. Permission being readily accorded, they were soon engaged

in animated discussion on the beauty of the surrounding scenery, and so fascinated did Lord Ballina become of the handsome stranger, that in a fit of enthusiasm elicited by her charms and conversation—the latter much interlarded with flattering encomiums on Shelah's beauty—ere they parted he had promised to bring his daughter to see her, and had also arranged for their making a picnic together to Chillon.

Long, but in vain Shelah waited that evening for her father's return, and it was only when a messenger arrived from the hotel with a few hasty lines from Lord Ballina, telling her he would not be home till late, that she sent away the dainty little repast prepared for his evening tea, while, deaf to Bridget's entreaties that she should go to bed, she could not be persuaded even to undress, until peeping through the casement of her bed-room window, she saw him returning home, and perceived that her handsome father looked unusually bright and cheerful. Then, without a word, she crept into bed and cried herself to sleep. She had attained the certainty that her society no longer sufficed him.

A few days later, to Shelah's inexpressible sorrow, they quitted their pretty chalet, and took up their residence at the hotel.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. LAWRENCE BROWN was a twice-made widow. Her first husband, a lieutenant in the army, had only survived his marriage a year, leaving her little else than his name, and an infant daughter wholly unprovided for.

If Mrs. Brown mourned her husband's death, it by no means interfered with her selecting a second help-meet with a celerity that even astounded those who best knew the vivacious widow's disposition. She calmly disposed of their astonishment by accounting for her short widowhood in the following words :

‘ You forget I have a child to think of. My heart is buried in poor Alfred's grave, *my* life is ended, but hers is all before her ; and Mr. Brown settles a handsome fortune upon little Adela the day I marry him, and that day, he says, must not be postponed.’

Having thus coupled her child's interests and Mr. Brown's ardour in one, and considering these combined facts were sufficient exoneration for apparently undue haste in the step she was about to take, Mrs. Lawrence became Mrs. Brown. She revealed to no one that by so doing she secured to herself great advantages in the way of wealth for the rest of her days. Nor was she long burdened with her second husband's society. He was more than an elderly man at the time of his marriage, and had left India, where he had spent thirty years of a hard life, to reside at Bath, for the benefit of his numerous ailments; here he met Mrs. Lawrence, and here decorously ended his days. Immediately on his demise, his widow, who had a tender recollection of her younger husband, incorporated the name of Lawrence with that of Brown, considering that the addition gave importance to a name that was in itself common and vulgar. But even when she had succeeded in becoming known under the double appellation, being a lady of exalted aspirations, she determined at the earliest opportunity to change it for a

loftier one. To become a member of the aristocracy was the object of her ambition, and, to a woman wealthy as she was, she considered this object easy of attainment.

When Mrs. Lawrence Brown heard of Lord Ballina's having a *châlet* at Vévay, to which place she had only come for a short time, her plan of campaign was at once decided upon. Being of an inquiring turn of mind, she quickly learnt that, though a nobleman, he was poor. She felt her chance had arisen, and at once decided to convert him into one of the richest members of the aristocracy. His having a child was unfortunate, because Mrs. Lawrence Brown disliked children, girls especially, all except her own ill-favoured Adela. She adored this daughter, the offspring of her girlish, first marriage, that Adela who, so opportunely, by not answering to her name, had paved the way for Mrs. Brown's making Lord Ballina's acquaintance. And yet this girl, the object of a mother's truest love, was plain, almost deformed—in fact, 'an ugly little brown thing,' as Bridget had termed her, and, moreover, she was peevish from ill-

health, querulous, and spiteful. But she was well-educated, and by no means deficient in worldly wisdom.

Mrs. Lawrence Brown was rather sharp, unscrupulous, and wholly uneducated. But some natural quickness enabled her effectually to disguise her lack of education; and being a keen observer of mankind, and having travelled much, and hovered a good deal on the outskirts of society in many lands, she turned these advantages to the best possible account at all times and seasons.

‘An uncommonly clever and agreeable woman,’ had been Lord Ballina’s dictum respecting the wily widow after the first afternoon he had spent in her society. Nor was he the only one of his sex who had passed a similar judgment on this lady after an equally short acquaintance.

When Mrs. Brown appears in our story, she was little under forty, but owing to great attention to her appearance and her self-indulgent life, she had preserved a singular freshness of appearance and youth. Nor were these personal advantages in any way dependent on meretricious

arts. Her hair, black as night, was guiltless of all restorers, her brilliant colour was her own, her forehead was smooth and unwrinkled. It was only when her face was in perfect repose that an ominous line between the brows, and certain slighter ones about her thin, tightly-closed mouth, indicated that Mrs. Brown was settling into the autumn of life, and also that she had a temper of abnormal violence.

Her daughter was just eighteen, and, as the two were engaged in conversation some ten days after they had made Lord Ballina's acquaintance, they presented the strangest contrast imaginable.

These ladies occupied the principal apartment of the hotel at Vévay, and, the afternoon being intensely hot, both windows and green jalousies were hermetically closed, and only a pleasant half light pervaded the apartment. Adela Lawrence was reclining on a sofa overcome by the heat and more than usually fretful, while close beside her sat her mother, armed with an enormous fan, with which she was ineffectually endeavouring to cool the air for her daughter's comfort, who observed, crossly,

‘There, that will do, mother. It is not a bit of good, and it only fidgets me. I wish we had not left Chamouni. Cannot we go back there? It suited me much better than this hot place.’

‘Impossible, Adela,’ snapped Mrs. Brown. ‘What an ungrateful girl you are!’

‘Oh, there is no use getting into a temper. I understand all about it, mother. Now that you have made Lord Ballina’s acquaintance, I suppose we shall stay in this hot, stuffy place as long as he does.’

‘Well, is it not quite as much for your advantage as my own that I have striven to make his acquaintance? Did I not make my second marriage for your sake, and yours only?’

‘Not the least for your own advantage, of course,’ maliciously snapped the invalid.

‘Every advantage that marriage brought me was shared by you, Adela. I did violence to my own feelings in order to procure you independence and wealth,’ reproachfully replied her mother.

‘And, having secured both for yourself at the same time, you now wish to lose them again,’ Adela laughed, spitefully.

‘Listen to me, Adela,’ replied her mother, kissing her daughter with such tenderness that it seemed as though some of her own redundant health must be transfused through the medium of that warm embrace into the sickly frame of the invalid. ‘We are rich, very rich, but we are nobodies. It is only on the Continent that we are accepted in any society. You have often desired to give up travelling—to remain quietly in England. If I marry Lord Ballina—a marriage I feel certain I shall ultimately accomplish—your wish can be fulfilled, while we at once get into society. We shall no longer stand trembling on the threshold of the great world of fashion. People will no longer dare, after accepting our dinners at Cannes and Nice, to turn their insolent heads aside when we again meet in London, or to ignore the cards we leave at their doors, as though they had never known us. Adela, don’t you understand, we can be avenged on these proud aristocrats, for we shall be one of their number?’

As she thus delivered herself of a long-standing grievance, Mrs. Brown’s face glowed and her eyes sparkled with the thought of her an-

ticipated triumph. She looked uncommonly handsome, and quite capable of carrying out every design of social revenge she harboured, if she ever got the opportunity.

‘I fail to see how your becoming Lady Ballina will enhance my dignity,’ drily remarked Adela. Then suddenly she sat up on the sofa, and, fixing her keen, clever little eyes of a greenish hue on her mother, exclaimed, ‘Mother, beware, you are falling in love with this handsome, penniless Irishman. If he marries you, it will be only for your money, and that you may settle it on that flaxen-haired child, whom he adores. You have forgotten her, and your dislike of children. How will it suit you to have this idol of your intended husband’s always near you?’

‘Bah!’ exclaimed Mrs. Brown. ‘And you are not civil, Adela. I am not only a rich woman—’ She gave a conscious little laugh.

‘You are a handsome one likewise, mother, I am well aware. But the first Lady Ballina was, I hear, the most beautiful of women, adored by her husband, and this child is hers.’

‘You speak like an oracle, and mean well, I

have no doubt, Adela. But I know what I am about. The child is of an age to go to school, where she ought to have been long ago.'

Mrs. Brown as she spoke moved to the window, ostensibly to open it, for the sun was sinking behind the mountains, but in reality to hide her rising colour. Adela had asserted a fact the truth of which she was hardly conscious. Her mother was not falling in love with Lord Ballina, she was already in love with the handsome, impecunious Irishman, and was determined to be victor in the task she had assigned herself of winning his affections. In everything she had hitherto striven for she had been successful. Her first husband had raised her from obscurity into a sphere of comparative gentility. At his death she had sought for riches, and, almost without an effort on her part, they had been abundantly accorded her. She was now seeking rank, a great social position, and, behold! they appeared to be within easy reach. Love she had never thought of when she first met Lord Ballina. But his handsome face, easy, agreeable manners, had made a complete conquest of the widow's heart, and

this new and powerful sentiment had engendered a less amiable one—jealousy of his daughter. If she succeeded in marrying Lord Ballina, could she ever hope to supplant this adored daughter in his affections? Evidently Adela was incredulous on this point.

As Mrs. Brown opened the window, Shelah's sweet, silvery laugh rose from the garden and re-echoed through the air. She was frolicking with a white Persian kitten given to her by the master of the hotel. Everybody desired to do something to please the lovely child, who was a general favourite not only for her beauty, but in consequence of her innocent, gracious manners; and then she was motherless.

'Pauvre petite, elle n'a point de mère,' was the sympathizing remark of the people about when they saw her go out on the lake with Bridget, as she had often done since they had come to sojourn at the hotel. For Shelah could not be induced to accompany her father when Mrs. Brown was to form a third in their expeditions.

Arrested in her occupation by Shelah's laugh, the widow peeped through the still closed

jealousies to observe what was going on in the garden, and feasted her eyes in silent admiration on Lord Ballina, who was sitting on the parapet overhanging the lake, smoking, and watching his daughter with amused intentness. It was fortunate the watcher above could not read his thoughts, for, at the same time, he was deliberating how soon he could leave Vévay and whither he should bend his steps when he had done so.

In truth, Lord Ballina was ruefully realising that he had placed himself in a very awkward position, and he was moreover becoming considerably wearied with Mrs. Brown's society and of her attentions. Her pursuit of him had been too ardent and too apparent, as was also his own superlative folly in having so precipitately made her acquaintance. He was angry and disgusted with himself for having given rise to hopes and expectations in the handsome widow's bosom he had not the most remote intention of gratifying. Marry again ! To commit such sacrilege to his beloved Helen's memory had never entered his head. Indignantly he repelled such

an idea, while the recollection of a certain moonlight evening spent on the lake with Mrs. Brown made him hot all over. It was this night's folly that had opened his eyes to the enormity of the error into which he had been led by his passing appreciation of that lady's flashy charms. He was too great a moral coward, and also too kind-hearted a gentleman, to consistently repel advances originating in his own thoughtless conduct. But matters had arrived at such a point that he must do something, and after considerable deliberation and wavering avoidance of the widow's society, too feeble and fluctuating to be noticed by her, he came to the conclusion that his only escape from her pertinacious attentions was in judicious flight. Thus, while she felt confident of carrying the citadel by a brilliant *coup de main*, Lord Ballina had determined on secret and ignominious retreat.

'Shelah!' called out her father, suddenly, after several minutes of deep reflection.

Flushed with running up and down the garden, and with her hair blowing about in every direction, she flew up to him, hugging the kitten

close to her face, and said, 'Is it not a lovely little thing, papa?'

'Would you not like to go on the lake, darling?' He pulled the kitten's whiskers absently as he spoke, and, as Shelah did not answer, he added, quickly: 'By ourselves. You and I alone. Kitty a third, if you like.'

'Oh, papa, how delightful! Let us come quickly away, before——' she hesitated.

'Before Mrs. B. appears. Is that it, Shelah?' he smilingly asked.

She looked at him significantly, and nodded her head. Drawing her towards him, he kissed her golden curls, tenderly saying, softly,

'You remind me of your mother more than ever, my sweet child. You have grown so much graver lately. You are not like yourself, I fear you were happier at the châlet. You avoid me sometimes since we have been here, Shelah.'

'Not you, papa, not you,' she said, colouring deeply as she climbed on to his knee, and, having dropt the kitten, she put her arms round his neck. 'But I was happier at the châlet. We were always together then. I had you all to

myself, and there is nobody so gay and pleasant as you are. I don't wonder at everybody liking you.'

Lord Ballina felt his little daughter's cheeks were wet as she pressed her face close to his own, and buried it in his luxuriant beard, and he whispered into her ear,

'Shelah, I wish we had never left the châlet, and I wish to heaven I had never seen Mrs. Lawrence Brown. She is like a burr; there is no shaking her off.'

Shelah gave a joyful little laugh as she replied,

'Oh, I wish, too, we had never seen her. I don't like her at all. She took hold of my curls the other day, and said I was too old to have them hanging about, and that they ought to be cut off because they looked untidy.'

'Your pretty curls! what business is it of hers, I should like to know?' exclaimed Lord Ballina, angrily, his intention of leaving Vévay considerably strengthened by Mrs. Brown's interference with Shelah's curls.

'I don't want to make you angry with her as she is a friend of yours,' said the child, prettily; 'and I know you must wish to be with grown-up

people sometimes. But I am getting older every day, and, when I am older and wiser, perhaps then you will not want anyone else for company. Oh, papa, my own papa, say you won't.'

She fixed her eyes, full of tears, imploringly on his face.

'My darling, I don't want anyone else for company, now or ever,' he exclaimed, clasping her in his arms, and covering her face with kisses. 'I have been an egregious donkey, but I shall be one no longer.'

He guessed at once what fears had been brooding in Shelah's mind, sown there by his own folly, as he well knew. And yet he felt humiliated, wounded to the quick that she could imagine he had so far forgotten the past as to think for a moment of supplying his Helen's place with another wife, of giving his daughter a step-mother. He was guiltless, entirely guiltless of such an intention.

Both Lord Ballina and Shelah were equally startled at this moment of mutual expansion by the noise occasioned, as Mrs. Brown threw open the jealousies of her apartment, and they both looked towards the hotel, when they perceived

the comely widow, hat in hand, smiling down upon them, as she gracefully kissed her hand in their direction.

‘Bother!’ exclaimed Lord Ballina, under his breath, while Shelah, scrambling off his knee, seized hold of his hand and, dragging at it, said with nervous impatience,

‘Oh, papa, make haste, or she will be here; let us run.’

Hastily picking up the kitten, she fled towards the lake, her father following in a few swift strides.

In the meanwhile Mrs. Brown, having donned her most bewitching hat, and armed herself with a roseate sun-shade, approached Adela’s sofa to bid her farewell.

‘I must go at once, Adela, or I shall miss him; that child has evidently wheedled Lord Ballina into taking her on the lake, and he promised to go out with me, this very afternoon, to Chillou.’

Mrs. Brown displayed all the fluttering excitement of a girl of eighteen about to keep an appointment with her lover. But the daughter placed a detaining hand on her mother’s arm, and said, emphatically,

‘Mamma, make no mistakes. I know nothing about lovers and love-making; nor am I ever likely,’ she added, bitterly; ‘but of this I am certain: if you wish to become Lady Ballina, you must be careful in all your actions with respect to his little daughter. Don’t snub her until you are Lady Ballina, or your chance is lost. And now, have you looked over that short abridgement I made out for you last night, heads for conversation? and I trust you have learnt those lines of Byron about the storm on the lake. They are very lovely and effective,’ she smiled, ‘especially when quoted on the spot which inspired them.’

‘Yes, yes,’ impatiently, ‘I glanced over the heads of conversation, and am quite up in the present state of the political world, Russia’s aggressions, etc. Poetry is no use. I have tried it, he does not care that for it.’

Mrs. Brown emphasised these last words by a suggestive snap of her fingers, and, having readjusted her daughter’s pillows, flew out of the room.

The abridgement to which Adela made allusion requires some explanation. Being a

clever girl, and too delicate and suffering to mix in society, she devoted her weary and otherwise unoccupied hours to literature, reading every book she could lay her hands upon with avidity: history, philosophical works of the most abstruse character, besides a daily and searching study of the papers, occupied her whole time. Such reading, though it had left her own mind in a rather chaotic and unhappy state, enabled her to coach her less enlightened mother on various subjects, and to enlighten her on many topics of which that lady was wholly ignorant, and who was consequently saved an intellectual labour she cared not for, and for which she averred she had no leisure.

The smattering of knowledge thus gained, however, enabled Mrs. Lawrence Brown to hold a very respectable place in conversation. When in society, if she were not quite secure of the subject under discussion she preserved a becoming silence, and remained an absorbed and attentive listener. Perhaps it was owing to this discreet silence that Mrs. Lawrence Brown had earned the reputation of being a remarkably intelligent woman. Everybody appreciates the

gentle flattery accorded by a good listener.

After her mother had left the room, Adela sank upon her cushions with a weary sigh, murmuring,

‘Rest, rest, at any price. Though, once she gains the prize she has in view, her love for the sickly daughter will be swallowed up in this new and more absorbing passion. So be it, if we only give up this aimless, roving existence.’

Then, urged by the promptings of curiosity the girl rose from her couch to observe what took place in the garden. Mrs. Brown was sailing swiftly down towards the lake with her feathers and furbelows fluttering in the breeze. She was as light-hearted as a girl of seventeen. Of course, Lord Ballina, would wait for her, was waiting. The fact was he had found difficulty in getting his boat off, notwithstanding his own impatience and Shelah’s anxiety, to avoid the widow’s accompanying them. If she reached the landing-place, ere they started, all was lost.

‘Oh, papa, why can’t we get the boat off?’ exclaimed Shelah, in tones of agony. ‘Don’t look round, she is quite close now.’

Notwithstanding that Lord Ballina was as

anxious as his daughter to escape the pursuer, he could not help laughing, for he felt his position partook of the ludicrous.

At last, crimson in the face from his desperate exertions, with one final effort he managed to shove the boat off, when with a few vigorous strokes of the oar they shot into deep water. In the excitement of success, he exclaimed,

‘Hurrah! Victory is ours, Shelah, unless she takes to the lake.’

Shelah burst into a ringing shriek of triumphant laughter, not only at their having defeated the widow, but at her father's ludicrous suggestion that she might take to the water and swim after the boat, in her present fantastic attire.

This triumphant and mocking laugh rippled over the lake and was heard by the irate and crest-fallen Mrs. Brown, who at that very moment had reached the landing-stage, panting, and unbecomingly flushed. But, though certain she had been observed by Lord Ballina, the boat sped merrily on its way, while she was left on shore, to digest this humiliating disappointment as best she might.

The expression of her face was not pleasant as she slowly bent her steps back to the hotel, with as much dignity as she could assume, for she was aware that many eyes were watching her ignominious retreat with malicious satisfaction. As she flung herself on a bench to regain composure and breath, and a more dignified appearance, she murmured, with angry vehemence,

‘So, my Lord Ballina, you propose to take me up and drop me at your pleasure. But no, it is that girl’s doing. Ah! Miss Shelah of the golden curls, I’ll be even with you yet.’

Adela Lawrence, who was still standing at her post of observation, looked down at her mother with a smile of half pity and malice, as she said, softly,

‘Poor mother! she is not quite so near the desired goal as she flattered herself. But there are more roads to Rome than one, and, pretty Shelah, you are no match for my very astute parent.’

These last words were spoken not unkindly. Yet, though Shelah had inspired Adela with both interest and compassion, she most ardently

desired her mother to be successful in her pursuit of Lord Ballina, for she was intensely weary of the nomadic life she had been forced to lead. She longed for rest, and, in the marriage her mother had in contemplation, she saw the prospect of a more settled existence for herself. Long ill-health had made Adela selfish.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was on a glorious evening late in July that Captain Carmichael, after a hurried journey, arrived at Baden. The sun had long deserted the valley in which this pretty town is so beautifully ensconced, and its fir-clad hills looked densely black and sombre against the soft pink sky, the after-glow of the sun's departed glory. The immediate vicinity of the hotels and Kur-saal Gardens were, however, gay enough, for the whole Baden world was out of doors, enjoying the cooler air that had been denied it during the almost tropical heat of the day. Everybody appeared joyous and smiling. Exquisitely dressed ladies of many nationalities flitted about in all directions, seemingly, as Shelah had observed in her letters, as free from care or sorrow as the summer butterflies, to whom they bore so strong a resemblance. Lamps were

already lit, and groups of both sexes sat in cheerful knots beneath the trees, sipping coffee or imbibing ices, laughing and flirting meanwhile with their attendant cavaliers, whose devotion to these bright dames in no way interfered with their vigorous smoking.

‘Shelah’s observation is not at fault. But what a place to bring her to, and the very last for him to be in,’ was Hugh’s reflection, as the strains of Strauss’ exquisite band fell upon his ear, enhancing the fascinating charm of one of the most delightful and dangerously seductive spots in Europe; for, at the time Lord Ballina had imprudently taken up his sojourn at Baden a strong imperial hand had not swept away with stern decision that terrible blot disgracing the Fatherland.

In every health-resort in Germany, the chief attraction was the splendid building called the Kursaal, devoted to the gamblers’ occupation, and, with its lovely gardens and musical bands, forming an irresistible attraction to the listless idlers and pleasure-seekers of all lands. But Hugh Carmichael experienced neither enchantment nor pleasure as he was driven rapidly from

the station to the hotel where Lord Ballina was residing. He had come to Baden, where he had never been before, for the sole purpose of persuading Lord Ballina to leave at once a place fraught with such infinite danger to a man so weak to resist temptation as he was. Yet he recognised to the full how difficult was his self-appointed task, for even at Malta Lord Ballina had proved impatient of his advice and admonitions, though these were guardedly tendered, for Hugh had discovered that his friend was jealous of the influence he had over Shelah.

Lord Ballina had, ever since her birth, been inclined to spoil his only child, and, when the selfish absorption of his great grief had passed away, his love for her, quickened by jealousy of Hugh, awoke with fresh vigour, and he became again completely devoted to Shelah, and endeavoured at times to counteract his salutary influence by half-laughing remarks on her mentor's undue severity. But, while Shelah made no disguise of the happiness she felt at her father's renewed affection, her allegiance to Hugh was never shaken. And when Lord Ballina, who hated to see his little daughter

poring over some task she was diligently preparing for her godfather, would strive to tempt her away from further study, torn between the wish to please Hugh, and the delight of an expedition with her merriment-loving father, it was only after a hard struggle she finally yielded to Lord Ballina's superior claims on her love and obedience. It was so difficult for Shelah to imagine anyone she loved, or who loved her, could be in the wrong. And, unfortunately, men who like Lord Ballina are guided by impulse are very often in the wrong.

One of these little scenes flashed across Captain Carmichael's mind, magnifying the difficulties he felt were lying in his path when he and Lord Ballina should meet. But his meditations were brought to an abrupt conclusion, as he found himself at the hotel indicated in Shelah's letter as the one where she and her father were residing, and a smiling proprietor, followed by a troupe of waiters, rushed to the door to greet his arrival.

Young, good-looking, vigorous, and healthy, this promising-looking Englishman was evidently another pigeon come to fling himself into Mon-

sieur Blanc's net. Poor pigeon! to be ultimately denuded of all its gay plumage. But what cared Monsieur Hoffmann if such a disaster should take place? That was not his affair and he rubbed his fat hands and bowed as obsequiously to the new arrival as though he had been an archduke, while with inward glee he prophesied his prolonged sojourn at his own hotel, and had accompanying visions of a lengthened hotel-bill, to be paid, if not by this good-looking milor himself, by his relatives or friends. Such things had happened before. And history repeats itself, especially at Baden.

‘Lord Ballina is staying here, I believe. Can I have a room?’

Hugh spoke excellent German, and was glad to have an opportunity of using it. But English, even in these days, formed part of the education of all Germans, and, though but imperfectly acquainted with the language, Monsieur Hoffmann, anxious to display his learning, replied in English, saying,

‘Most certainly milor can have apartments, though Baden overflows. Will milor trouble himself to mount to the troisième?’

‘I don’t care if it is the neuvième, as long as I can get into this hotel,’ replied Hugh, good-humouredly, adding, with a smile, ‘I am not a milor.’

‘Ah!’ the exclamation one of prolonged surprise. ‘Monsieur has all its appearance. But, now I observe more nearly, monsieur has more the “air militaire.” Will le general be goodness itself, and view its apartments.’

This jumble of genders, milors, and generals, caused Hugh to laugh outright, as he replied,

‘Not a general yet, but I hope soon it will be colonel.’

As he followed the still chattering hotel-keeper to a very scantily-furnished apartment *au troisième*, Monsieur Hoffmann, having gathered from the new arrival’s words that he was acquainted with Lord Ballina, thought the moment opportune for making certain enquiries respecting this nobleman, who had been living at his hotel over six weeks, and to find out whether he was as wealthy as his rather lavish expenditure implied. As yet he had not even asked to see his rapidly increasing bill, which was filling Monsieur Hoffmann’s mind with vague apprehension,

for he was well aware where Lord Ballina's days and nights were passed.

Hugh's portmanteau having been brought up, Monsieur Hoffmann peremptorily dismissed the garçon, and was beginning, fussily, to unpack it, when Hugh called out impatiently,

'There, there, that will do. I am my own valet. I prefer waiting on myself. What o'clock is your table-d'hôte? And can you inform me where I am likely to find Lord Ballina?'

Monsieur Hoffmann was at the door, but skipped nimbly back, saying,

'Table-d'hôte is over for to-day, Monsieur le Capitaine. But I can serve you *petit diner* in the salon, at any hour. Milor Ballina? *mais certainement* you will discover at the Kursaal. He is "joueur effréné," hardly gives himself time to eat or drink. But he has the luck—the luck. He did break the bank in his first week.'

Monsieur Hoffmann spoke in tones of ardent enthusiasm. He was too excited to observe the look of dismay pictured on Hugh's face, who remained totally silent, not wishing to arrest the flow of sad intelligence flooding his ears. It was best he should know the worst. It would

make his future course of action easier. As he remained silent, Monsieur Hoffmann continued, with great excitement,

‘But the bank he cannot break every night, and Milor Ballina on dit has had its reverses. But then milor is millionaire—has its thousands ! So its losses count not.’

The hotel-keeper’s words were those of assertion, but doubt was expressed on his face as he thus spoke. Hugh stood in the middle of the room, with knitted brows, and pulling his long moustache as he listened to the man’s alarming statements, but the only reply he vouchsafed was,

‘Thank you, Monsieur Hoffmann, I take little interest in the gossip of the Kursaal. Will you kindly arrange that my place at the table-d’hôte shall be next to Lord Ballina.’

‘Impossible. Milor always has seat between Madame Brown and Mees Fitz-Maurice. Ah ! *quelle belle demoiselle* is placed on the other side of Milor and Mees Lawrence. I am desolated, I cannot make accommodation for monsieur.’

‘Then place me as near Miss Fitz-Maurice as you can,’ responded Hugh, waving his hand

impatiently towards the door. He had already divested himself, partially, of his dusty travel-stained gear, and wished to be alone.

Could it be possible that all this man had said was true? If so, how had Helen's husband fallen from the high estate to which her love had striven to raise him? And this Mrs. Lawrence Brown must be the very woman to whom Shelah had alluded as being the object of her fear and aversion. Poor, deserted, unhappy girl! And as Hugh, with utmost celerity, changed his attire, Helen's voice seemed to be ringing in his ears, urging him to fly to her husband's rescue—her beautiful, earnest eyes seemed to be pleading with him for instant action in favour of Shelah's future happiness.

It was already dark, when Hugh emerged from the hotel and walked rapidly through the gardens, in the direction of the Kursaal. Before seeing Lord Ballina, he hoped to come across Shelah. He had made inquiries, and been informed by a civil maid that mademoiselle was not in her apartments, but probably monsieur would find her in the gardens with her *bonne*, as she often sat there until a late hour in

the evening. But for some time Hugh searched in vain for the sweet face he loved and knew so well. Was it possible her father could have taken his daughter again into that den of iniquity, the Kursaal? His blood boiled with indignation at this surmise. But no, Ballina could not have repeated so grave a transgression. To have ever done so must have been a solitary instance of thoughtlessness. He was so little given to reflecting on the consequences of his own actions—he loved so to have Shelah always with him. Hugh was endeavouring to frame excuses for his friend—for Helen's husband.

Not knowing his way about the gardens, but determined to find Shelah, and thinking she and Bridget would most likely seek some retired spot for their evening walk, Hugh plunged down a dark alley, and had not taken many steps when, to his great satisfaction, he caught sight of her he sought sitting with Bridget on one of the garden-benches. She was reading out loud, while this faithful woman busily plied her knitting-needles. A lamp hanging above from a tree afforded them the light required for their mutual occupations, and also, by shedding its

radiance on Shelah's shining golden hair—for, the night being sultry, she had thrown aside her hat—betrayed their hiding-place to Hugh.

Shelah was so deeply absorbed in the book she was reading, her eyes were so intently fixed on its pages, that it gave him time to sadly note how pale and thin she had become in the few months they had been separated. He was also struck at observing how much older she looked; the time separating childhood from girlhood had been passed. Sorrow, anxiety she ought never to have known, had aged his dear young companion. After a few seconds she stopped reading, and, without raising her eyes, asked pensively,

‘Bridget dear, is it nine yet? Papa promised to come here at that hour and walk home with me.’

The tone of the soft, flute-like voice displayed such deep anxiety that it imparted the same to Hugh. Before Bridget could reply a distant church clock struck out the hour, and, springing to her feet, the girl looked with painful eagerness up the walk Hugh had just traversed. Instantly she perceived him, and, with a cry of overwhelming

joy, she darted towards him like a bird who seeks refuge from some terrible impending danger, and, as he clasped her in his arms, she clung to him with convulsive tenacity, exclaiming,

‘You are here! You are here at last, Hugh, dearest Hugh. Oh, how happy I am, how happy;’ then she burst into a flood of hysterical weeping.

‘My darling Shelah, is this the proof of your happiness?’ he asked, kissing her tear-bedewed face with greatest tenderness.

‘I am crying for joy—for joy that you have come back to me—to my father,’ she whispered. ‘I wanted you so much, and so does he. How glad he will be to see you.’

Hugh considered this last assertion extremely doubtful, but replied, as he led her back to the seat where she had been sitting,

‘Well, here I am, Shelah, and more glad to see you than words can express. Do you know I have travelled day and night to get here quicker, and be in time for your birthday tomorrow. And my present is quite ready for the occasion. Shall I tell you what it is?’

‘How kind and good you are! But it is you

yourself I wanted,' she said, lovingly, placing her head on his shoulder, and rubbing it up and down against his coat like a kitten. 'And I don't want to know anything about the present until to-morrow.'

'When you will be thirteen. What a great age! But how pale you are, child, and thin; and, though you are so old, surely you ought to have been in bed long ago. I am afraid Mrs. Bridget, with whom I have not yet shaken hands, is becoming over-indulgent. Is it so?'

He turned and held out his hand, with a kindly smile, to the Irishwoman.

'We are waiting for his lordship, sir. He promised to fetch Miss Shelah home; but I think, me jewel, we had best wait no longer. Maybe his lordship has forgot to come; he does now and again.'

'No, no, I am sure he has not. And I won't stir until I see him,' exclaimed Shelah, with a passionate petulance most foreign to her usual sweet manner. 'And it is unkind of you to say papa forgets me. It is only very, very seldom,' she added, turning to Hugh, and fixing her dark eyes, the beautiful tell-tales of a sorrow

she was endeavouring to disguise, piteously upon him.

‘Suppose we go in search of your father, Shelah?’ said Hugh, rising. ‘But you must be my guide, or I shall certainly lose myself in these intricate, obscure gardens. Come, dear child. Why do you hesitate?’

Slowly Shelah rose in compliance with his desire; but, as she placed her little hand in his, he was shocked at its tremor and coldness.

‘Perhaps papa will be here in a minute or two. Ah! there he is,’ she exclaimed, in a voice of ecstasy, bounding forward in front of Hugh. But it was not Lord Ballina, and she returned quickly, saying, with the deepest dejection,

‘It was not papa, after all. Will you come back to the hotel with us, Mr. Hugh? No, no, not that way, not by the gardens. We might meet Mrs. Lawrence Brown. And, oh! I hate passing the Kursaal.’ She shuddered as she spoke.

‘There, there, Miss Shelah, never mind the big, ugly, wicked “Curse Hall.” It is well named; it has a shining outside, but a black, foul interior. Don’t think about it, darling.

Now Captain Hugh has come back to us, the saints be praised, he will take us away from this bad, wicked place.'

Anxious as Hugh was made by Shelah's whole manner, and mystified by her shrinking dread of passing what Bridget so quaintly termed the 'Curse Hall,' he could not repress a smile at the aptness of the Irishwoman's unconscious simile; but the smile died quickly away as he felt the clasp of Shelah's hand tighten nervously on his, while, on looking down, he was alarmed to see that her face had assumed an ashen hue. Fearing she was going to faint, he turned inquiringly to Bridget, who whispered,

'We had better get home at once, sir. I am afraid one of her attacks are coming on.'

But Shelah, who was evidently battling with herself, said, gaspingly,

'No, no, Bridget dear, I am not going to be ill. But I don't want Mr. Hugh to come with us.' She dropped his hand, and clasped her own together in entreaty. 'I want you to go in there'—she pointed towards the Kursaal—'at once—at once—and bring papa away.'

Then, as though the flood-gates of her terrible unhappiness had been suddenly opened by Hugh's presence, she gave full sway to the hitherto pent-up sorrow of her heart, and her words flowed out in a torrent. 'Oh! dear Hugh, quick—quick—bring him away. I'm so frightened—so unhappy.' She looked round with wild, terrified eyes, while her voice fell into an awed whisper. 'A man—a gentleman—shot himself a few days ago—there—there in the gardens—because he had lost all his money. I saw it all. And—and'—the sweet young voice rose in agony—'papa—papa has lost money. I don't understand everything. But, oh! bring him away—bring him away. He will be safe now you are come. Go! Go! I am well, quite well again.'

As she spoke, with all the force of her small hands Shelah strove to push Hugh in the direction of the glittering, illuminated Kursaal.

But the excitement of his arrival, and the inspiring trust it had given her that all the anxieties and misery she had so long endured would now be ended, had been too much for

her delicate frame, and, even as she passionately declared she was quite well, she fell into his arms, to all appearance in a state of insensibility.

Both Bridget and Captain Carmichael had, however, seen her in similar attacks after her mother's death, and were aware that if she ever underwent any strong mental emotion they might probably recur; they also knew that while her muscles and limbs were perfectly rigid, and she was deprived of all power of movement, she was nevertheless conscious to sound, and that her brain was as active as her body was impassive and incapacitated during the time these attacks lasted.

Gathering her up quickly in his arms, and noting how the imploring look with which she had last looked at him remained stamped on her dark, velvety eyes, he whispered, low and distinctly,

‘Shelah, my darling, you can trust me—I shall take you home, and then go immediately to the Kursaal and bring your father to your side. Be at rest, dear girl. Have no fear for him.’

Though deprived of the power of replying,

he knew she had heard him, for her eyes closed, and ere they reached the hotel she had fallen asleep in his arms.

And such had ever been the merciful ending of all her similar painful attacks.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN, having left Shelah at the hotel under Bridget's care, Captain Carmichael hurried towards the Kursaal, he had not formed any definite plan of action. He was well aware of the deep fund of obstinacy underlying Lord Ballina's character, and that, though he might be fully alive to the error of his ways, he would not be easily persuaded to tear himself from the seductions of Baden. But the alarming alteration Hugh had observed in Shelah's appearance, and the return of an illness they trusted she had long outgrown, would be, he hoped, powerful advocates in his favour, unless Lord Ballina had become callous to all parental duties. Dismissing this idea, however, as quite improbable, he passed rapidly through the first rooms of the brilliantly-lighted Kursaal, for a glance had assured him that he whom he sought was not

there. Roulette does not afford sufficient excitement to the habitual gambler. Passing on to the salon devoted to rouge et noir, the crowd here was so great it was with some difficulty he made a passage through it. The air was stifling, but finally, having elbowed his way through this excited mass of human beings, he managed to find standing-room close to the table where the more determined players were seated, their countenances portraying all the miserable passions by which they were actuated.

But these players did not concern Hugh, except inasmuch that he sadly reflected Helen's husband had sunk to their level, and, as he looked around in search of Lord Ballina, he faintly hoped he might not discover him amongst these hopeless gamblers. Vain hope! In another moment his eye fell upon the form he knew so well, and his heart sank within him. Could this indeed be his handsome, laughter-loving friend—this haggard, worn-looking man, who appeared as though he had not slept for nights, and whose crisp, golden curls and beard usually kept so bright and trim were now dull and dishevelled, while the expression of his

cheerful, genial countenance was so changed as to leave him but the semblance of his former self.

Hugh groaned in spirit as he noted the alteration that persistency in a fatal, soul-destroying vice had worked in the handsome Ballina. At the present moment, with his elbows resting on the table, and his hands wildly clutching the thick masses of his dishevelled curls, he was intently watching the dealer, and debating in his mind whether to allow his large stake to remain on the table, or at once to realise his gains and withdraw from further risk. There had just taken place one of those astounding runs on the red, and a mass of Lord Ballina's ill-gotten notes and gold lay on the winning colour. The pallor of his face and the eager glance of his eye as he watched the automatic movements of the dealer betrayed the dreadful anxiety of mind under which he was labouring, for he was neither a philosophical loser nor calm winner. Drops of perspiration stood on his face as the stolid croupier called out the numbers, and once, with a nervous movement, he stretched out his hand as though to withdraw

his stake, but it was now too late ; and after all red turned up, and he was again in a fair way of once more breaking the bank. This delirious hope decided him, and the infatuated man allowed his money to remain on the table.

In the meanwhile, Hugh had come round to where Ballina sat, and, as he watched his friend's terrible emotion, it was impossible for him not to feel intense interest in the turn events might take, although he little surmised of what consequence their results would be to Lord Ballina. As the fatal words, 'Rouge perd-couleur gagne,' passed the croupier's lips in perfect indifference as to the effect they might produce on his hearers, and at the same time he swept away the whole of Lord Ballina's stake, the unfortunate man pushed his chair wildly back with a suppressed oath, and, rising impetuously from the table, hastily turned to leave the room. As he did so, he found himself face to face with Hugh. At so unexpected a presence the colour rushed in a torrent into his pale, perturbed face, and he started back, exclaiming in shame and dismay,

'Good heavens, you here?'

‘I have only been in Baden a few hours, and have been searching for you everywhere. Come outside with me, Ballina. I must speak to you at once. I have something of importance to communicate.’

As Hugh spoke, he placed his arm within his friend's and led him away from the scene of his disasters.

Lord Ballina made no resistance. The very shame and contrition Hugh's unexpected presence inspired him with were salutary in their effects. Secretly he rejoiced in his sudden presence. If ever a man required counsel and aid, he did. All his past jealousy of Hugh was forgotten at this moment. He felt like a man reprieved from death, for this friend of long-standing might—would certainly, if it was in his power—save him not only from the consequences of his past folly, but from greater disaster looming in the distance.

Strongly agitated as both men were, neither spoke until they found themselves in the outer air, when Lord Ballina, who had been sitting for hours in the oppressive atmosphere of the rooms, staggered like a drunken man, as the

fresh breeze blew on his heated face. Hugh, in no little alarm, led him to the nearest bench. As Lord Ballina sank down upon it, he said, with attempted hilarity,

‘Don’t be alarmed, dear old Mentor. I am perfectly sober, delighted to see you, and prepared to listen to any amount of advice you think advisable to administer to this profligate.’ Then looking gloomily down, he continued, ‘Only take into consideration that blood is thicker than water. The blood of my ancestors is asserting itself, Hugh. The hereditary disease has broken out again in another generation.’

‘Forewarned, forearmed, Ballina. Aware of your danger, why throw yourself in the way of temptation?’

‘Circumstances drove me here, and circumstances of a most unfortunate nature retain me in this confounded place. It is no longer a case of choice,’ groaned Lord Ballina.

‘But you cannot—must not remain here. Are you so blinded by your infatuated passion as not to have observed the terrible change that has come over Shelah?’

Lord Ballina had indeed observed it with

bitter grief and self-upbraiding. And it was in the hope of sufficiently retrieving his losses to enable him to pay his heavy hotel-bill, and quit Baden, that he had risked on this evening every farthing of which he was still possessed. A desperate venture that had left him in a more unfortunate position than before. At present he was so absolutely penniless that previously to seeing Hugh he had entertained the thought—for which, notwithstanding, he loathed and abhorred himself—that he must no longer coldly repel Mrs. Lawrence Brown's advances. For this lady had followed him to Baden, and so conducted herself that it was impossible for even the least vain of men to mistake what had been the motive power that had made her come there.

And, notwithstanding his daughter's undisguised aversion and shrinking avoidance of the widow's society, the unfortunate Ballina would certainly, in his despair and desperation, on leaving the Kursaal have taken some ill-considered and irretrievable step, had it not been for Hugh Carmichael's timely arrival. But though he had the fullest reliance on Hugh's

judgment, as he reproachfully alluded to Shelah, the old jealousy of his influence over her asserted itself, and he said, sullenly,

‘You have seen her then already, and she has been giving you a detailed account of her good-for-nothing parent’s doings.’

‘Nothing of the kind. I found her in the gardens, anxiously watching for your arrival, and in a state of pitiable agitation. She implored me to seek for you. The dreadful event which took place here last week appears to have completely shattered her nerves. Oh, Ballina! how could you expose her to the chance of witnessing such a catastrophe?’

‘Have you come here to preach me a sermon on my parental duties?’ still more sullenly responded Lord Ballina, though fully alive to the truth of every word his friend uttered.

‘You know better. I have simply come at Shelah’s earnest request to bring you away from a place which fills her young mind and heart with horror and dread. She is now asleep. But I grieve to tell you that, in an endeavour to narrate to me the awful event of last week, she became so agitated that it ended in her having

one of those attacks we trusted she had outgrown.'

Lord Ballina started to his feet exclaiming,

'Good God! I am justly punished. My darling! Let us go to her at once. Hugh, I am the weakest, most miserable wretch in existence.'

He struck his forehead, and there was a sob in his voice as he spoke.

'Nay, do not be too alarmed. She is asleep now, and Bridget thinks will remain so. It is only in case she wakes up that your presence will be absolutely necessary to reassure her.'

'Oh! Hugh, what an unnatural parent you must deem me. And yet, you cannot doubt that I love my child with every fibre of my whole heart. It was in order to get away from this cursed place—in order to avert a still greater misfortune—that I made that last desperate plunge to-night. I did not come to Baden with the remotest intention of gambling. Indeed, aware of my own danger, I solemnly vowed never to enter that cursed place. But one unlucky day a lady,' Lord Ballina hesitated and coloured, and repeated nervously, 'a lady of my acquaintance begged me to put

some napoleons down for her. I could not refuse without appearing ridiculous, and in her success—for she had a most extraordinary run of luck—I was lost. From that moment, the devil of play took possession of your unfortunate friend, and has landed him into a quagmire of inextricable difficulties.'

The two men were walking rapidly in the direction of the hotel as Lord Ballina made his confession, every word of which was a further proof of the speaker's lamentable weakness of character. But Hugh, who had observed his hesitation in alluding to Mrs. Lawrence Brown and foresaw even greater evil for Shelah in the future than he had anticipated, reserved all remarks on his friend's delinquencies for a later period, and asked, quietly,

'May I ask who this lady is who has proved so dangerous and so seductive a Circe, and succeeded in making you break all your prudent resolutions?'

'Oh, a Mrs. Lawrence Brown, whose acquaintance I accidentally made at Vévay, and who followed us here—and, by Jove! here she is. Let us hasten; she will remain talking for an

indefinite period. And I want to get to my poor child.'

With Hugh as a supporter, Lord Ballina had gained a moral courage which would have wholly failed him had he been alone. But, if he wished to escape the widow's observation, he was mistaken. Detaching herself from the friends in whose society she was, and wholly indifferent to Lord Ballina's evident desire to avoid conversation and pass on, she held out her hand, saying, with a keen glance into his face,

'I hope you have had good luck; but what an inveterate gambler you must be to resist the temptation this heavenly night offers of being out-of-doors, and have you forgotten you were engaged to have supper with me?'

The last words were spoken in a tone of soft reproach as, for a moment, she held his hand in hers with tender pressure.

'I fear I must withdraw from my engagement to-night, Mrs. Brown,' he replied, nervously, glancing at Hugh, and dropping the lady's hand with uncomplimentary haste.

She perceived the glance and resented the action, but observed, blandly,

‘Any friend of yours will be welcomed by me. Pray introduce me. I am sure this must be Captain Carmichael, of whom I have so often heard you speak. But his arrival shall not be made the excuse for throwing me over.’

If Mrs. Lawrence Brown thought to conciliate Hugh by this remark she was mistaken. Her voice and intonation were not those of a well-born woman, and, from the moment she had opened her lips, he had taken a strong aversion to the handsome widow. As the introduction, which was now unavoidable, took place between them, he had ample opportunity of studying her countenance, and was startled, not only at her undeniable good looks, but also at the unfavourable judgment formed by so young an observer as Shelah on one bearing this fair exterior, and yet a judgment he instinctively felt was correct.

Recovering from the disagreeable astonishment occasioned by the dimensions of the intimacy between Lord Ballina and Mrs. Brown which her manner asserted, he replied, gravely,

‘I fear neither Lord Ballina nor I can avail ourselves of your invitation, Mrs. Brown.’

‘Yes, I am really extremely sorry,’ quickly

added Lord Ballina, now become quite courageous, 'but I am hastening home to my child—she has not been well, and I have only just been apprized of her illness. I am sure you will consider this sufficient excuse for our not joining your party, and pardon me for bidding you what I fear must appear a rather unceremonious good-night.'

Both men bowed hastily and moved on. As they disappeared, Mrs. Lawrence Brown watched them with an angry glance, murmuring,

'So I have another foe to combat! just as fortunate circumstances had rendered my success certain. Ah! if it were not for that girl, he would have proposed long ago.'

Great as was her mortification at the *fiasco* of the entertainment she had prepared expressly for Lord Ballina, and from which she expected momentous results, not a trace of discomposure was visible on the widow's face as she rejoined her party and said, smilingly,

'We need not postpone our supper any longer on Lord Ballina's account, for that poor girl of his is ill. It is a sad pity she has not a proper governess to take care of her, for really that

uncouth Irishwoman counts for nothing. But men never understand these matters.'

Mrs. Lawrence Brown sighed as though profoundly touched by Shelah's deserted condition.

'If report speaks truly, Lord Ballina will soon have some one to aid him in the care and education of his daughter,' slyly observed one of those present.

Mrs. Lawrence Brown desired nothing more than that the Baden world should consider a tender understanding existed between herself and Lord Ballina. But, pretending confusion at this remark, she passed her hand over her face, saying, with a pleased simper,

'Lord Ballina and I are friends, simply friends. And you forget what a determined gambler he is: I also have a daughter's welfare to think about, Captain Arkright.'

Notwithstanding these cunning words, Mrs. Brown was not only perfectly indifferent to the fact of Lord Ballina being a gambler, but upon it she had founded her chief hope of becoming his wife, and was quite convinced that, when her ambitious dream was realised, she would be equal to keeping him within bounds and preventing him from dissipating her fortune.

The real obstacle that impeded her path to victory was, she well knew, Lord Ballina's love for his daughter, and, following Adela's advice, she had since their arrival in Baden made strenuous efforts to win Shelah's good graces. But all her civilities were coldly and determinedly refused. Offers to take the young girl out driving met with curt refusal. If she gave her Parisian *bonbonnières* of extravagant price, she had the mortification of seeing Shelah dispense them with contemptuous, reckless generosity amongst the children assembled in the gardens; occasionally on a passing beggar.

Finally one day, with studied civility, Shelah calmly requested Mrs. Brown to give her no more bon-bons, as she did not care for them, and Bridget did not approve of her eating them, and she never did anything she disapproved of.

It was war to the knife after this between Lord Ballina's sensitive, refined little daughter, and the woman who, hating her, yet was determined to become her step-mother. What chance of victory had innocent Shelah, whose only weapon of defence was love for her father, devotion and reverence for a mother's memory,

against one who had been scheming all her life, and always with triumphant success. Shelah's dislike of Mrs. Brown had been intensified by an ill-advised remark of her father's, who said one day, with jocose nervousness, when he was overwhelmed with money difficulties, and the dire possibility had arisen in his mind that, in order to extricate himself from the effects of his own folly, he might be forced to offer the widow his name,

‘Why, Shelah, you and Mrs. Brown, I am glad to see, appear to be on quite friendly terms.’

‘On friendly terms? I hate her more than ever,’ was the encouraging rejoinder. ‘And, oh! papa, you don’t like her really.’

The beautiful dark eyes of the speaker spoke volumes, and beneath their steady glance Lord Ballina’s sank abashed, for he knew his daughter had uttered the truth.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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